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THE

DIAMOND AND THE PEARL,

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. GORE,

AUTHOR OF "CASTLES IN THE AIR," "THE BANKER'S WIFE," "PIN MONEY," "MEN OF CAPITAL," &c.

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

NEW-YORK:

H. LONG AND BROTHER,

46 ANN-STREET.

1849.

A. CUNNINGHAM, PRINTER,
47 Ann-street.

THE DIAMOND AND THE PEARL.

CHAPTER I.

Sir George Downham, the proprietor of one of the pleasantest seats in the county of Suffolk, was a man endowed with so liberal a share of worldly advantages, that nothing could be less easy to account for than the discontented cast of his countenance, and sarcastic turn of his mind.

Like too many others he was the victim of inordinate pretensions.—Much as Providence had made him, he wanted to be more.—His deceased father, Sir Jeremiah, having cultivated as a virtue in this his only son, the point of character in which the youngster most closely resembled himself, all that had been done for him by education, was effected through the stimulus of vanity. At school,—at college,—"Distinguish yourself, my dear boy, distinguish yourself, and you will make me the happiest of men!" was still and ever the cry of Sir Jeremiah.

Thus encouraged, young Downham *had* distinguished himself. Before he quitted Eton, he had made himself a name; and at Cambridge, honors succeeded to prizes, and the plaudits of his father to both. Great things were augured of him; and the Dons of the Senate House looked big when they pronounced his name. Young Downham would doubtless embark in public life, where they predicted that a brilliant career awaited him. The same interest which had procured a baronetcy for the father, would probably secure for the promising son, a government borough and place.

But though Sir Jeremiah was more than satisfied with the plumage and flight of the eaglet of his hatching, he was constantly urging him to fresh exertions, by taunts not altogether to the taste of the young wrangler. When alone with his son, he did not scruple to remind him of a fact, which he would have repudiated with indignation had it been brought to his own recollection by the urgings of some over-familiar friend.

"Bear in mind, George," said he, "that, as landed proprietors of this county, we are regarded by most people with jealousy, by many with contempt. I have done much—I might say perhaps done *wonders*—by raising myself—a mechanic's son, and educated by public charity—to the rank we at present occupy; nor has it been effected without toil, privation, *and self-sacrifice.* The sweetest blessings of human life, my boy, *I* never tasted. My childhood was prolonged starvation,—my youth, slavery. You, George, who sometimes complain that I exact undue mental exertions of you, may thank your stars that you came into the world as successor to a father whose patience and self-denial raised you from one of the lowest to one of the highest conditions in the country. All I ask of you, in return, is to do honor to the pedestal upon which my industry has placed you."

Luckily there was sufficient of his father's ambition upspringing in the mind of the individual thus apostrophized, to render the tasks imposed upon him less irksome than to many a young man of his years. For already, amid the rough buffetings of a public school, George Downham had been more than once twitted as a nobody. Lord Wilsdon, the son of the lord-lieutenant of his county, had, on the day of his arrival at Eton, branded him as a *parvenu;* and even Lord Harry Knox, the offspring of his father Sir Jeremiah's ministerial patron, the Duke of Warton, was more than once heard to address him with, "Here, *you*—Smith—Downham—what's your name!" The result of all which was, that by the time he was entered at Trinity, the young scholar had come to soliloquize with, "My father is right!—I *must* distinguish myself. These blockheads shall learn to respect me."

For, to the credit of Lord Harry's veracity, if not of his courtesy, the elder Downham was in truth "*ne* Smith." He might have been born anything else, however, for aught that it signified. For he was a parish orphan—a parish apprentice; and though good abilities and steadiness obtained him a very early patron in the master to whom he was articled, (a ship-owner in the small maritime town of L——, which in wartime managed to convert the sands of its little port into gold dust,) the most sanguine of his friends could never have surmised that, at five and thirty, his own economy and a handsome gratuity from his master, would enable him to quit the laborious life he had been leading, and the native town where the stigma of his origin was perpetually staring him in the face, and purchase a share in a thriving country bank.

Ten years afterwards, his fortune was doubled; and with his fortune, his ambition. Instead of turning his thoughts to the enjoyment of the means his industry had amassed, the once-starved boy, because able to live hand-

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somely, chose to place his happiness in living sumptuously. The name of Smith, associated with his early degradations, was a curse to him. He did not like the dignified air in which the chief patron of his bank, Lord Harry Knox's father, the Duke of Warton, pointed to a chair when he waited upon him at Warton Court; as though it depended on his Grace's pleasure whether his "good friend Smith" should be seated. *He* knew of certain obligations on the part of the Duke, which brought them tolerably to a level.

"The Downham estates touch awkwardly upon the Knox property," mused the country banker to himself one day, as he drove back his gig at a brisk pace to his counting-house, after one of these vexatious interviews. "If the Downham nominee chose to contest the representation of Doesbury, by Jove, the pride of these Knoxes might have a fall!"

And so exulting was his glance, as the idea passed through his mind, that it was plain the sober-sided man of forty-five cherished some secret project connected with the estates in question.

Anybody cognizant of their peculiar position and occupation, would have cleared up the mystery in a moment. The Downhams of that ilk were an ancient family, recorded in Domesday-book, and having contributed their quota of victims to Cressy, Agincourt, and the wars of York and Lancaster; though from Tudor times, little had been heard of them beyond the confines of their county. While the Houses of Stuart and Hanover were governing or misgoverning the land, the Downhams contented themselves with fattening beeves and brewing ale under the shelter of their ancient oaks; fulfilling the duties of rural hospitality, and scattering the crumbs to the poor.

Under the influence of narrow minds and lymphatic constitutions, they had droned selfishly and obscurely through the civil wars and political dissensions of the last century; *more* selfish and *more* obscure, from generation to generation; till, at the death of the last squire of the dynasty, about the time when Jeremiah Smith became acting partner of the firm to which was assigned the task of annually investing somewhat more than a moiety of Mr. Downham's handsome income, the whole of the property fell to the share of his only daughter,—a sickly shrivelled damsel, on the shady side of thirty, but fifty in health and complexion. For Margaret Downham's youth had been dried up in the stuffy rooms of a valetudinarian father; till so nervous was her temperament, that her first impulse on seeing a stranger was to whimper. And when apprised that the old man's death had placed her in possession of Downham Hall and four thousand a year, besides a handsome amount of funded property, her sole desire was to shut herself up unmolested in the old place, as her parents had done before her; content with a weekly pilgrimage to church, the curtseyed allegiance of the gaffers and gammers of the village, and an occasional carouse of green tea with her worthy old neighbors the Wattses of Doesbury Lodge.

The old place, however, defied her. The venerable manor house was worn to a cobweb; till its dilapidation had become not only disgraceful, but dangerous. Smith, the banker, her father's executor, was the only person who had courage to represent this to Miss Downham. And when, after gravely assuring her that, some tempestuous night, the whole structure would probably come down about her ears, as more than one stack of chimnies and a portion of the west wing had already done by way of warning, and witnessed the almost stupified terror with which she listened to his prophecies, and the agony with which she demanded, "What would become of her if forced to desert the old house, or while a new one was building?" —he promptly replied by an offer of his heart, hand, and comfortable home in the market place of Ipswich,—others besides the sickly spinster might have been tempted to believe that the humane banker acted on the impulse of the moment.

"Poor, helpless creature!—she would be so overcome, so stunned, by the sudden change in her uneventful destinies; so hectored by new servants—so pillaged by tradespeople—unless an active faithful friend stepped forward in her behalf!" was the plea he found to reconcile the world to his proceedings.

And though, twelve months after the event which served to convert her from Miss into Mrs. Downham, and Smith the banker into Squire Downham of Downham Hall, the "poor helpless creature" was deposited beside her father in the family vault of the adjacent church, even *then* no one was found to say that since fated to die so early, it might as well have been to die single, as married. For she had lived to give an heir in the direct line to the old Downham estates; and the handsome freestone mansion of which the foundations had been laid in her lifetime, was completed just in time to do honor to the christening of little George.

It was a fine place, and a credit to the neighborhood. Still, there were incongruities and discrepancies at Downham Hall which told their own story; or rather, the story of its proprietor. A total want of analogy prevailed between the bran-new, hard, square walls, with their cornices of stucco, and plate glass windows, and the quaint old family portraits of the race of Downham; which, now that their blood, flowing in the veins of his little son, was commingled with his own, the new man could as little have borne to suppress or consign to a lumber-room, as an archduchess to fling into the Danube her necklace of Oriental pearl; albeit, their peaked visages and starched hoods were strangely at variance with the gilt furniture and Axminster carpets, proclaiming the opulence and ostentation of the newly-engrafted branch.

But though these contrasts were clearly apparent to the supercilious refinement of the Knoxes and Lord Wilsdon, the neighboring town of Doesbury was charmed with the elegance and trimness of the hall. In their eyes, the old place was as thoroughly converted into a paradise by Jeremiah Smith, as Jeremiah Smith by

virtue of a Herald's College diploma, into Jeremiah Downham. For them, he had ceased to be a parvenu. They only wondered that he did not cease to be a banker!

The new Squire, however, knew better. Loving money, not for its own sake but for what it would purchase, while so much that was desirable and buyable remained to be had, he could not gather riches too eagerly. Though the original motive of his mercenary match had been to vex and rival his aristocratic patron, no sooner had he compassed the means of irritating the Duke of Warton by a contest for Doesbury, than the desire abated. The fable of the earthern pot and the pot of iron occurred opportunely to his mind. Though he had accomplished a wondrous ascent up the ladder of fortune, so much still remained to be achieved, that it appeared better policy to convert the great man of the neighborhood into a friend than a foe. Alliance and not opposition was what he needed.

Now to make himself a friend at Warton Castle, he must, of course, make himself useful! and it was only by remaining "Smith and Co." the aspiring man could hope to obtain grace as a Downham. He had still an object in view. Till he had achieved a step beyond his wife's predecessors, he felt rebuked by the old portraits and ancient oaks; and fancied himself half a "Smith" till he could hear himself hailed "Sir Jeremiah." He wanted to feel that, in his own person, he had done something to enhance the consequence of his son, as heir of the time-honored race of Downham.

By a series of able negotiations, accordingly, instead of becoming a candidate for Doesbury, the wily capitalist became mortgagee of certain farms on the Warton estate, and a baronet. In those days, government evinced its contempt for rank by rendering it a marketable commodity; and no one but the Duke and the Tory premier, his colleague, knew precisely the amount which it cost the country banker to have a new plate engraven for his one-pound notes, in honor of Sir Jeremiah Downham, Bart., and Co.

And now it was that, more than ever, he urged on the efforts of his son. It belonged to the heir of his honors to justify the greatness he pretended to have had thrust upon him. Sir Jeremiah had discovered very early in their enjoyment, that though he had fully succeeded in dazzling the eyes of the little, the great continued to survey him with unabated coolness; that, to acquire the regard of the hereditary aristocracy, something more was required than the transformation into a sorry baronet of a still more sorry esquire.

The consequence of all this spurring and goading was, that young Downham was taught from his cradle to affix a higher value on tinsel than on sterling ore. In the opinion of Downham Hall—(whatever might be that of Sir Jeremiah's house of business in the Market Place,) all *was* gold that glittered. Provided the young Cantab shone as a prizeman, the general cultivation of his mind or perfectionment of his character, was a matter of indifference to his father.

Old Downham was fated to be disappointed, however, on bringing to material proof the value of the honors on which he had so earnestly insisted. His patron, the Duke, being now an influential member of the administration, he had nothing doubted that his former delicacy respecting the representation of Doesbury, would be rewarded by the return of his son for one of the government boroughs of those unreformed times. For his Grace was fully aware of the striking abilities of the aspirant. His Grace had been duly apprized of all the university honors obtained by young Downham, and that he was that *rara avis*, only too often hatched by the patent incubation-system of parental vanity, "the most rising young man of the day." There was every reason, in the new baronet's estimation, for his Grace's introducing to parliament a neophyte fated to become its Chatham.

The duke, of course, knew better. Judging according to the code of a world, which to Sir Jeremiah Downham, *ne* Smith, was terra incognita, he saw no reason why the raw son of the man who had obliged him only as any other banker similarly situated would have done, should obtain his parliamentary education at the cost of the country. If Downham senior chose his son to figure as a senator, he must pay for his whistle. The ministry of which his Grace of Warton formed a part, could by no means afford to become responsible for the blunders certain to be committed by a tyro, who, like all juvenile geniuses, would be seeking opportunities to attract attention to himself, instead of working with the zeal and self-effacement incumbent on a Treasury hack.

CHAPTER II.

So thorough a conviction had been impressed on the mind of young Downham by his vainglorious father, by way of stimulus to his exertions, that the Duke of Warton was awaiting only his emancipation from college to introduce him into public life, that he had some cause to feel galled and disappointed on learning that government had no sort of occasion for his services.

Still, his father having so strenuously insisted on the necessity of his strengthening their family consequence by writing himself down M.P., he entertained no doubt that the old gentleman would accept the ministerial hint, and purchase him a seat.

But he was mistaken. Sir Jeremiah had hampered himself so extensively by assistance to his aristocratic patrons, and an annual expenditure purporting to raise him to what *he* considered their level as country neighbors, that he had no money to throw away for any such purpose. It was in vain the aspiring young man pleaded and remonstrated. Unwilling to assign the true motives of his conduct, his father chose to allege that certain of his Cambridge indiscretions must have reached the ears of his Grace, by means of his son, Lord Harry Knox: smarting under which im-

putation, young Downham was taunted into declaring that the reluctance of the Duke of Warton to bring him forward, was far more likely to originate in the ignominy of their original Smithhood.

"The Duke is the proudest man in England," said he, bitterly; "and had we belonged to some staunch old county family, he would have turned a deaf ear to idle scandals which attach equally to every young fellow in the University. Were Pitt and Fox saints? or was Canning, pray, a Dr. Cantwell?—No, no, my dear father! Rely upon it my sole sin in the eye of the Duke, is our want of connexion."

And so implicit was old Downham's faith in the infallibility of his Phœnix, that he actually began to think so too. From that time his cry of "distinguish yourself, my dear boy," was changed into "establish yourself in life by a good connexion, and you will obtain an opening to distinction."

But the seed of ambition had been sown by Sir Jeremiah in such a fertile soil, that his exhortations were superfluous. The only difference between the views of the father and son was, that the aspiring George had already formed at college a variety of showy friendships and acquaintanceships, which caused *him* to regard the estated squires and country baronets so venerated by his father, as contumeliously as *he* fancied himself regarded by his Grace of Warton; and when dispatched to town for the first time by Sir Jeremiah, to enjoy the pleasures of the season, or rather to turn them to account, he promised himself that his liberal allowance and outfit should not be thrown away on so small an object as had been pointed out to his ambition.

Much, however, as young Downham thought of himself, of certain circumstances in his favor, he was stupid enough to take no account. He was too imperfectly skilled in the tactics of social life, to know the merit of being a dark horse; or that, next to possessing undeniable advantages of rank and fortune, it is something to be totally unknown. The son of a foundling, he had no second-rate connections to compromise his entrance into the coteries of London. All that could be told by his Cambridge friends of the handsome Downham who was living in handsome chambers in the Albany, was, that he had been the first man of his year, and that his father, Sir Jeremiah, possessed a handsome old family seat called Downham Hall; and the young man of such prepossessing appearance, whose voice was so melodious, and whose demeanor so ingratiating, was consequently soon launched as a partner among the Lady Julias and Lady Sophias, the sisters of his college chums.

Thus entitled to pick and choose, he made his selection with a degree of hardihood that did almost as much honor to his genius as his Cambridge degree.

On arriving at Downham Hall one sultry Saturday evening in July, when he knew he should find his father enjoying his weekly respite from the cares of his counting-house, he greeted the old gentleman with a demand for his consent and blessing, in a tone of self-possession, that showed him perfectly well assured of both.

"My dear father,—wish me joy!—I am going to be married!"—said he, as soon as the cloth and servants disappeared, after their *tete-a-tete* dinner.

"*Going* to be married!"—responded Sir Jeremiah, with an emphasis, plainly implying that the consummation of such a project must depend upon himself.

"Even so, sir. You have always wished that I should settle early; and you see me an engaged man."

"I have certainly more than once intimated a desire, George, to see you established in life; with due deference, of course, to the eligibilities of the match," was the formal rejoinder. "I wished you (you must recollect that I told you so at parting) to marry young, if you could marry to my satisfaction."

"In that case, you should have more distinctly informed me, sir, in what consisted your satisfaction."

"No need of that, George! We understand each other sufficiently on most points for you to know that the chief thing to which I hold, is family connection," replied the old gentleman drily. "In all treaties of alliance, people and countries seek to strengthen their weak points."

"I flatter myself then, sir, that you will have no fault to find with my selection. The young lady who condescends to honor me with her hand, is the daughter of Lord Glastonbury."

"Lord what!—cried the old banker, aghast.

"The Earl of Glastonbury,—the representative of one of the most ancient houses in the kingdom."

"And she has actually accepted you?" demanded Sir Jeremiah, having scarcely yet recovered breath for the question.

"Lady Emily has not only accepted me, but her father has granted his consent to our union," was the unflinching reply.

Sir Jeremiah began to unbutton his waistcoat,—having previously unbuttoned his coat. He who had not contemplated without awe having the daughter of some ancient country baronet seated by his fire-side, could not at once compass the overpowering idea of becoming father-in-law to a ladyship!—"Lady Emily Downham!"—What a pity that the Right Honorable name could not be super-added to his own on the copperplate of his own pound-notes!—

"An Earl and a Lady Emily are fine-sounding things, George," said he. "But I take it that neither one nor t'other would have fallen in our way, if able to maintain themselves in their natural sphere."

"Lord Glastonbury enjoys an unencumbered estate of ten thousand a-year, sir," was the cool rejoinder of his son.

"But, of course, entailed. And on such estates, where are daughters to look for their portion?"

"Entailed, as you say, sir—of course. The fifteen hundred per annum of which Lady Emily Hartley is in enjoyment, is derived from her late mother. She and her sister, Lady Mary, are coheiresses."

"Lady Emily and Lady Mary Hartley!—Co-heiresses!—Fifteen hundred a-year in enjoyment!" reiterated Sir Jeremiah, with a stultified air—for he was becoming almost apoplectic under the excess of his son's good fortune. "God bless my soul, George! I do congratulate you indeed. Of my consent you did right to entertain no doubt. But what a pity, my dear boy, that female titles of honor are not hereditary! Lady Emily's sons and daughters will be plain Misters and Miss Downhams after all."

"Let us hope not, sir. The ancient Barony of Hartingham, represented by the late Lady Glastonbury, is in abeyance between her daughters. And as Lady Mary is slightly deformed, there is little chance of her marrying. You may therefore eventually become grandfather to a Lord Hartingham!"

"But since this lady,—so rich,—so high-born,—so largely endowed,—consents to become the wife of one so much her inferior in station," said he, tremulously; "I am half afraid, George,—sorely afraid,—there must be some terrible drawback on her side. An old maid, perhaps?"

"Scarcely nineteen, sir."

"Some personal defect, then?—Red hair perhaps?—or squints?—or ——— "

"Do not waste your time, sir, in devising defects for her!" interrupted George, wanting patience to hear lameness, blindness, or deafness ascribed to the beautiful girl whom, to his credit, he had in the first instance selected only at the instigation of her personal attractions. "Lady Emily is young, beautiful, and good-tempered. I am sorry to find you think so meanly of your son as to hold him unworthy a better match than some wealthy hunchback or titled hag!"

Sir Jeremiah replied by falling on his neck, and all but weeping for joy.

"What will the Duke of Warton say to all this!" faltered he, as soon as he had recovered his parts of speech. "And Lord Wilsdon, too, who was refused only last winter by a Bristol heiress!"

It was the end of the season. Lord Glastonbury, as much of a country gentleman as comported with the dignities of the peerage, was eager to get out of town and look after his crops; and being a widower, with no punctilious countess to create difficulties concerning the completeness of the trousseau, or re-setting of the Hartingham diamonds, the settlements and wedding-cake were manufactured in haste,—perhaps to be repented at leisure.

The gentle and sensitive Lady Emily was too completely submitted to the object of her first attachment, to find fault with his eagerness; and just as the leaves of the trees in Grosvenor Square were beginning to turn yellow, and those at Glastonbury Castle to put forth their Midsummer shoots, the grand event came off; and St. George's Church beheld its ten thousandth edition of bridal orange-flowers and tittering bridesmaids, in honor of one of the gravest mysteries of the Christian faith.

The wedding was a very brilliant one. It was remarked, however, by certain ill-favored nieces of Lord Glastonbury, whom the spites of neglected spinsterhood rendered clear-sighted, that the brow of the handsome young bridegroom was strangely overclouded as he entered the travelling carriage which was to convey him to his honeymoon at Downham Hall: a gloominess hard to account for; as no one could have the slightest surmise, that, a quarter of an hour before, while Lady Emily was changing her dress for the journey, he had been an unnoticed spectator of a little scene between his sister-in-law, Lady Mary, and her cousin, Captain Hartley of the Guards, whom she was forbidding to offer his congratulations to the Earl.

"Papa will easily dispense with them, my dear Tom," said she, in a half whisper. "He is out of sorts and out of spirits. Of course, if he had known the truth, he never would have sanctioned the match. But how was he to suspect it! A country baronet, with an old family place! It was not till one of the Knoxes enclosed him, last night by the post, one of old Downham's five-pound notes, he could be brought to believe that the whole story was not a malicious invention. However, it was then too late! Emily really likes him, and a rupture would have made her miserable. So we have all pocketed the affront, and the less said about it the better."

Young Downham was, of course, in his turn, forced to pocket the affront which thus reached him by a side-wind. Though he had judged it unnecessary to advert to his father's origin and occupation, in his explanations with the family, he had nothing doubted that Lord Glastonbury, from his extensive connection, and the anxious interest he must take in his daughter's welfare, had fully acquainted himself with all that could be learned concerning her future husband; and till the mischief was thus accidently disclosed, he had little suspected that he was entering the Hartley family, almost in the character of an impostor!

The spirit of young Downham was absorbed by misgivings lest the lovely girl who had so generously endowed him with her beauty and fortune, should be already repenting the alliance that connected her with a country banker and the ubiquitous horde of Smith.

Far different, however, were the thoughts of the pensive bride. Lady Emily was wondering whether the absent, taciturn man by her side, could be the self-same devoted and exulting George of the preceding day. Where were the snatches of remembered poetry wont to flow as by inspiration from his lips? Where were the mellifluous sentiments, as sweet to hear as to utter? Where were the protestations of eternal love and fidelity, more apt to originate in fulness of joy and confidence, than from doubt or distrust? Alas! the eye of the pre-engrossed man had become stony,—his persuasive tongue, mute. The frame of George Downham was indeed seated beside her,—his soul was absent without leave! On seeing him thus lost in reverie, so sudden a depression of spirit overcame the lovely bride, who had been approaching her future home in all the fulness of youthful joy, without a regret for the princely castle of her ancestors, or the high est.

from which she had descended to become the wife of the man of her choice, that others beside the bridegroom were justified in supposing she half repented her precipitate match.

Sir Jeremiah was the only person who saw nothing in this sad and silent young creature, except a Lady Emily,—an Earl's daughter,—the future mother of a baron. His right honorable daughter-in-law was to *him* as the princess of a fairy tale. Too much could not be attempted for her satisfaction. On her arrival at Downham Hall, she might, if aurivorously inclined, have eaten gold.

Though hitherto his chief anxiety had been that the beautiful Emily, so beloved and cherished at home, should experience in her new abode no falling off in her customary luxuries and attendance, his feverish vanity now took the alarm lest she should fancy the deference with which she was surrounded at Downham Hall was tendered less to the lady of his love than to the daughter of an Earl.

Lord Glastonbury was a man of narrower intellect than was desirable in an hereditary legislator. In his best days, he had not passed for a Solon; and now that he waxed old and foolish, profane people in club windows were apt to call him by his right name. Even his new son-in-law, amid the perplexities of his wedding preparations, had occasionally muttered the epithet so cavalierly applied by Napoleon to his imperial father-in-law, of "*Vieille ganache!*"

But if not a very discerning father,—as may have been evident in his insufficient inquiries into the birth and parentage of the youthful heir of Downham Hall,—he was a very tender one. He had given his dear Emily to the man whom she declared to be the possessor of her heart; and on seeing her so happy in her betrothment that she seemed to have suddenly outgrown even the natural delicacy of constitution which had often alarmed him, he began to feel towards the author of so auspicious a change, as towards a son of his own. But when, a few months after her wedding, she arrived on her first visit to Glastonbury Castle,—pale, thin, enfeebled, dispirited,—he had scarcely patience for a civil welcome to her husband.

"I tell you what, Mary, my dear," said the Earl to his unmarried daughter, the first time he found himself alone with her after the Downham's arrival; "your sister is not the same creature she was when she left my roof! Mark my words, if the poor girl has not been moped or worried to death, among this man's vulgar relations. The sight of her pale face makes my heart ache. I won't part with her again, Mary, to have her come back to me such a wreck. My poor Emily will soon recover her cheerful countenance in her old happy home."

"Emily is tired with her journey, papa," said she. "She was never such a busy, noisy, rackety creature as I am. In my company, you have forgotten her quiet, gentle ways."

"Not at all, my dear,—not at all. If *you are* a whirlwind, Mary, *she* was a westerly wind;—*never a dead calm*—as now."

"*Nothing but fatigue!*—*Leave her* to recover herself, and in a day or two she will be as fresh as a rose! I can assure you, dear papa, she told me yesterday, in her dressing-room, half an hour after she arrived, that she was the happiest creature in the world; and that Sir Jeremiah Downham, and all the rest of them, had done their very utmost to forestal her wishes on every point."

"*Sir Jeremiah Downham!*" muttered Lord Glastonbury, shrugging his shoulders. "That ever the comfort of a daughter of mine should be dependent on a Sir Jeremiah Downham!"

"If my brother-in-law were to hear you mention his father in so disparaging a tone, papa," remonstrated Lady Mary, "his grumphy looks would no longer surprise me."

"You admit, then, child, that he *does* look grumphy!"

"I was wrong to use such a word:—in the first place, because it is vulgar; in the next, because I verily believe the only reason we find him over-solemn and unpleasantly distant, is because my cousin Tom's free-and-easiness has put us a little out of conceit with decorum."

"I am sure I wish poor Emily's husband would take a leaf out of Tom Hartley's book!" cried Lord Glastonbury, with sudden animation. "*There's* a young fellow, now, after my own heart;—keeps the house alive with his fun,—and a plaguy deal of sound sense at bottom! More use, I take it, in a practical shrewdness like my nephew's, than in all the problems and conundrums of a *senior optime* like this precious Mr. Downham!"

"To tell you the truth, papa," said she, "I suspect that the present delicacy of Emily's appearance, is only the result of her situation."

"*Situation!*" cried the Earl, starting up. "Do you mean, my dear, that your sister has the prospect of becoming a mother?"

"From something Whitfield whispered this morning, I fancy so. Emily has not said a syllable on the subject; so, perhaps, it is wrong of me to advert to it. But I felt anxious to set your heart at ease."

She spoke to empty air. At the first hint she had afforded, away hobbled her father out of the library where they were sitting; and he was already half up the staircase leading to Lady Emily Downham's apartments. Lady Mary followed with nimbler footsteps, to beg and entreat he would not harass her sister by premature inquiries; and accuse herself of folly and indiscretion. But the Earl was not to be dissuaded. "He *must* see his darling Emily. He MUST embrace her, and wish her joy."—His whole heart was on his lips.

A grandchild,—a grandson,—was the only gift of Providence that could reconcile him to the early loss of his Countess: whom he had lamented less as a patient loving wife, than as having left him but a couple of girls. A baroness in her own right, it was almost inexcusable, he thought, that she should have produced only female offspring. His earldom was well provided with heirs; his next brother, a bishop, being the father of a promising son; to say nothing of his nephew Tom Hartley, one of the numerous offspring of a still younger

brother. But if his daughters died unmarried or childless, the barony of Hartingham, inherited from their mother, became extinct; and the idea of any sort of benefit or premium enjoyed by the family, being lost to it for ever, was too trying to his fortitude.

Now that he knew better, all was well again, and she was once more his favorite child. "His little girl must make a better fight of it against an indisposition so natural and so desirable: his little girl must not suffer herself to be cast down." Holding her fondly in his arms, he kissed and congratulated her again and again: and that day, after dinner, almost before the servants had withdrawn, and in the presence of two formal country neighbors, actually drank to the health of the future Lord Hartingham.

Lady Emily was embarrassed almost to tears;—for with the natural reserve of a woman long motherless, she had not yet announced her expectations to one still more interested in the event than her father. Her husband's cold reserve in domestic life had created a distance between them all but unnatural; and now, her father's abruptness had converted her discretion into an offence. Already she read in George Downham's louring looks, his disgust at the conduct of the woman who could communicate a circumstance so delicate, to others, rather than to the father of her expected child.

While the Earl was setting down his glass after his inconsiderate toast, Lady Emily heaved a sigh from the bottom of her heart. She felt that a new contrariety had arisen to widen the breach betwixt her and her husband. Without a fault on her side, she was continually giving him offence. And now, the announcement to which she had looked as likely to approximate them into the affectionate familiarity of earlier days, was converted into an element of discord.

True, on the other hand, to the resolution he had taken at the moment of overhearing Lady Mary Hartley's ignominious allusions to his family, of maintaining his personal dignity so loftily as to render it impossible for his wife or his wife's relations to tax him with abject deference towards their superior rank, George Downham repelled, as unworthy, the impulses natural to every husband similarly situated, and refrained from all allusion to the coming event.

There was little need indeed for him to recur to the subject, for Lord Glastonbury talked of nothing else. This exaggerated solicitude had the two-fold disadvantage of rendering doubly apparent the apathy of her husband. In proportion as Lord Glastonbury's anxiety increased, the haughty reserve of Downham grew colder and colder: for the earnestness with which the old man insisted that the heir of his deceased wife's honors should be born under his roof, was interpreted by the banker's son into disgust towards Downham and its inmates. Too proud to enter into an altercation on the subject, he gave up the point, as unworthy a thought: and Lady Emily Downham was established in her old apartments at Glastonbury, and the annual departure of the family for town delayed for a month or two, in order that "Lord Hartingham" might see the light on aristocratic ground.

The households of such families as Lord Glastonbury's being careful to view men and things in the same light as their masters, not a word or smile hinted in the presence of the Earl that more than common, or rather more than necessary importance was assigned to a very ordinary event. But the ridiculousness of many of his precautions warred so strongly against George Downham's sense of marital authority, that very often did he snatch up his hat and dash out into the park or shrubberies, to walk off his irritation;—bitterly conscious that the triumph of proving to the Knoxes and Wilsdons that his father's son could marry into a family as noble as their own, might be indeed dearly purchased.

Never did these outbursts occur more frequently than during the Christmas holidays, which Tom Hartley the Guardsman came down to spend with his uncle. For Tom was an outspoken, jovial fellow, who said every thing that came into a head not overburdened with sense or refinement; and Mr. Downham was at once mortified by the airs of superiority and proprietorship he assumed in the castle, as kith and kin with the family; and disgusted by the bantering tone in which he alluded to Lord Glastonbury's "reckoning on the cock chicken before it was hatched."

"If, after all, Mary, your sister should take us all in!" said he; "if these cockades and christening robes, and top boots, and hunting whips, and what not, should turn out to be for a little Miss Downham!—How my uncle would draw in his horns, eh? and how confoundedly foolish we should all look in the eyes of the neighborhood!"—

Lady Mary laughed heartily in reply; for as long as she had been able to laugh, her cousin's rattle had passed for wit at Glastonbury. Nay, when the grand event at length justified his prognostications, and a little daughter replaced the expected Baron, she laughed again:—chiefly because her dear sister was safe and happy; but partly because, as her cousin Tom again suggested, "the governor was so confoundedly wroth against his son-in-law and Providence!"

Instead of extending his invitation to the young couple to accompany him to town for the season, as would have been the case had the important cockades been brought into play, the Earl actually took occasion to assure Mr. Downham, that, as his wife was a nurse, she would be much better in the country, and recover her strength far more rapidly at Downham Hall.

Had he known to what surly companionship he dismissed that gentle daughter, he would have acted in a different manner. For Lady Emily had to endure if not such overt expressions of disappointment on the part of her father-in-law as of her father by birth, at least all the crabbed sullenness which may be supposed to have arisen in the mind of the country banker. For a man of newly-ennobled family is still more solicitous about the

establishment of a dynasty, than a man of rank for the perpetuation of his ancient name; and Sir Jeremiah felt almost defrauded of the heir which Lord Glastonbury's fussiness had appeared to foreshow.

Luckily, Lady Emily's serene temper was proof against these vexations. She was too happy as a mother, to take heed of her mortifications as a wife. Her pretty little babe consoled her, even when her husband, unable to conform to the dull monotony of country life at a moment when the London tulip bed was putting forth its gorgeous colors, the opera breathing its delicious harmonies, and the clubs and coteries prattling their brilliant chat,—took himself off to town for a week, on pretence of wanting to consult a dentist or lawyer, or some other indispensable excruciator of the human mind or body; and while there, contrived to accomplish the object of his former ambition, by bribing an Irish member to accept the Chiltern Hundreds.

But even the news of his being in parliament did not divert Lady Emily's attention from her babe. Though destitute of all society, except during the weekly visits of her father-in-law and morning visits of her country-neighbors (a worthy countryfied couple of the name of Watts), her little Helen sufficed for her happiness. And when, some weeks after, George Downham returned from London,—the holly-hocks being then in bloom, and the peaches nearly ripe,—she seemed to fancy it was still summer, and was surprised to find that the House was prorogued, and that he had been nearly three months away!

CHAPTER III.

When in due course of time, the following year, Lady Emily Downham was again about to become a mother, she took care that the event should not be announced to her father; who, established for the summer at Glastonbury, was content to correspond with a daughter who supplied him with such unprofitable olive branches.

Her precaution was a wise one. Had the Earl indulged in renewed hopes, they would have been again destined to disappointment. The newspapers, and George Downham's letter to his noble father-in-law, announced the birth of a second girl,—a new Miss Downham,—a torment the second! No more chance of a boy than if, instead of being heir to a barony of the days of Magna Charta, the unwelcome infant had been born, like its grandfather Sir Jeremiah, in the workhouse.

Still, Lady Emily complained not. If little Blanche did but prove half as fair and attaching as little Helen, she should be the proudest of mothers; and when the nurses were compelled to hint that the infant was delicate, so tenderly did her heart soften towards it, that she would not have changed that fragile little being, for all the heirs apparent of the peerage! Its feebleness was but a source of fonder endearment. For the mother taxed herself with it as a fault.

"It is all my fault," she thought as her tears fell upon those little waxen hands and delicate limbs; "I had no right to fret! But during the time of George's canvass and election I was so anxious, that I did not allow myself a moment's peace!—However, there is hope yet! Care will do wonders for this dear little creature. She *must* live,—she *shall* live,—to be as beautiful and brilliant as her sister, and reconcile both my father and George to the want of a son."

If the truth must be told, both the Hartley and Downham families resigned themselves readily to the probability that this "fairest flower" would be "no sooner blown than blighted." Even George, whenever one of the affectionate letters of his wife came to ruffle his London pleasures with news from home, was rather sorry than glad when Lady Emily apprised him that Barker the apothecary, (a man, who obtained his living by ministering to the ailments, and echoing the opinions of the Hall,) assured her the baby was decidedly improving; and that unless the air of Downham proved too damp for it, there was every probability of its doing well.

He was partly moved, indeed, to certain bitter epithets which he bestowed on Barker's officiousness, by recollecting that the same hint had been applied from the same quarter to his wife! Whenever Lady Emily was attacked with a sort of agueish fever to which she was subject, Barker had presumed to hint that a constitution long acclimatized on the rocky heights of Glastonbury Castle, might suffer from the vicinity of so large a body of water as the Downham Lake; till the new M.P. began to fear that a time was approaching when his bachelor pleasures in town would be invaded, and the decree of the faculty decide that Lady Emily and her children must share with him the benefit of change of air.

But what, it will be asked, said Lord Glastonbury to all this? Had he no warmer interest in his child and grandchild, than to visit upon them his own carelessness in allowing a daughter of his house to match with a *parvenu*, by overlooking her wasted frame and languid deportment? The fact was, that his attention was absorbed by preparations for the marriage of Lady Mary with her cousin. Disgusted by young Downham's solemn pedantry, he had taken the rattling Guardsman to his heart; and his wishes for the Hartingham peerage rested wholly in the scale of her sister.

So many, however, among the relations assembled for the festive occasion, tried to call his attention to the alteration in Lady Emily's spirits and health, that the Earl was at length forced to represent to his son-in-law, that though two thousand five hundred a-year might not procure them a brilliant existence in town, it would afford a home where the advice of the best physicians was at hand, and whence his own duties in parliament could be as well fulfilled as from a fashionable hotel. His poor Emily rewarded his fatherly interfer-

ence with a faded smile, when she found it settled that, thenceforward, they were to have a house in town; where the society of her sister (restricted to London, as a Guardman's wife) would fill up the painful void created by the too frequent absence of George.

A few months afterwards, and Lady Emily, relieved from the formality of Downham, and restored to the society of her early associates, was looking almost herself again; and in the pride of exhibiting her two pretty little girls, her Diamond and her Pearl, to her relatives and friends, she almost forgot to how many of those nearest to her they were objects of indifference.

Even on her husband, their transplantation produced an advantageous effect. His withered affections budded again, till new leaves and flowers embellished every barren twig. Lady Emily, animated and healthful, became the Lady Emily of his early love. Redeemed out of the false position in which they were mutually placed in Suffolk by his father's vulgar obsequience, he ceased to mistrust the deference she unvaryingly testified towards himself; for in London he felt elevated by the very rank which seemed to depress him in the country. Once more launched among her equals, he gained by her consequence. Even the Knoxes could not pretend to shrug their shoulders at Mr. and Lady Emily Downham; passing current as they did in the high-flying circles in which they moved.

"As soon as you recover your confinement," said the now cheerful husband, "I must see about getting you the alternate weeks of an opera box for the season; and out of the fifteen hundred pounds my father gave me for our outfit, I shall also be able, my dear Emily, to afford the baroucche I talked of before we left Downham. The children and you will be the better for an open carriage."

It was almost the first time he had avowed an interest in anything the "children" might be the better for. And without pausing to consider more than that he spoke kindly *to* her, and *of* her darling girls, she raised his hand gratefully to her lips, and felt that, after all, she had perhaps been premature in deciding her marriage to have been a mistake. The true happiness of her wedded life was probably only now beginning.

Four days afterwards, she was in her coffin! And, alas, the dead infant lying upon her shrouded arms was a son,—a lovely boy,—all that she or hers could have desired to complete her happiness! A fright from a restive carriage-horse had shaken her already enfeebled frame; and she passed from worldly cares to the peace that passeth all understanding, at the very moment when, if conscious of the awful change awaiting her, she would have found it of all others most difficult to die.

Deep was the affliction produced by this direful event. A woman dying in childbed is more lamented than others; for there is something piteous, something commemorative of the original judgment upon sinful human nature, in the *fulfilment of the primitive curse*. But in *Lady Emily's case* there was more than all this. There was the remorse of the husband, who knew that the smartings of his peevish vanity had caused him to visit on the gentlest of human beings the hauteur of the relatives from whose fondness he had withdrawn her; and the self-upbraidings of the really-attached father and sister, who knew that, because they disliked the husband of her choice, they had neglected the dear one, once the joy and promise of their life. But she was gone! Their ill-fated Emily was beyond the reach of atonement. All that remained for them was to wear her memory in their heart of hearts, and be true to her children for her sake.

Still, even in the house of mourning, a dispute had already arisen, such as perpetually arise in families cemented by an unequal alliance. Lord Glastonbury having found leisure to lament, amid his parental tears, that a daughter of his house should be laid in the vault of a banker *ne* Smith, had entreated, had almost *insisted*, that his beloved Emily should be carried down to the mausoleum of her ancestors, and deposited by the side of her mother; to which unreasonable request, poor Downham, softened by his domestic misfortunes, replied at first in mild and forbearing terms, that the wife who had vowed at the altar to forsake her father's house and cleave only to her husband, belonged to him in death as in life; and since she would not of her own free will have forsaken the fortunes she had adopted, must lie where his own ashes would one day be deposited. When Lord Glastonbury persevered, he pleaded the law of the narrow-minded—*custom*. "It would be thought strange if his Lordship, who had granted him the hand of his living daughter, should evince a doubt of his worthiness to be possessed of her remains."

A quarrel ensued. And from the ill-judged obstinacy with which Lord Glastonbury had insisted on interring his deceased daughter among her own people, it came to pass that not one of her family followed her remains to the grave.

And thus, the advantages anticipated by the ambitious Downham from his aristocratic connections, were thoroughly frustrated. Everybody in his neighborhood knew,—for in a country neighborhood such things are matters of careful inquiry,—that he was not on terms with Lord Glastonbury's family; and all sorts of ridiculous motives were assigned for the rupture.

The person most mortified at the event which put a close to the ennobling prospects of the Downhams, was, of course, Sir Jeremiah; who scarcely found a tear for the memory of the sweetest and least assuming of daughters-in-law, so vexed was he that she had betaken herself from this world without leaving an heir male to his family.

Another year, and he also, with his gigantic aspirings, was gathered—not to his fathers—for where was he to find them?—but to the ancestors of his son; one of the last perceptions of his enfeebled intellect being that, since his son knew so little how to profit by his advantages, he was a far less potent genius than had been always supposed.

In spite of his prominent organ of self-esteem, Sir George Downham shared largely in the convictions of his deceased parent. But his self-depreciation had been forced upon him by circumstances of which his father knew nothing. The new baronet was painfully aware that the seat in parliament which had cost him a sum of nearly three thousand pounds, had served only to show him up as a failure. Like many other precocious geniuses, the self-created luminary had been as easily put out as a gas-lamp.

The House of Commons, so apt to set up its quills at the announcement of a new member capable of improvisating a king's speech or per power of rhetoric overturning a ministry, had basely coughed him down. His parliamentary *debut* chancing to occur at a moment when the insolence of Tom Hartley had curdled the very marrow within his bones, he had brought but half his faculties to the struggle: a cold reception benumbed the other half; and, behold! he quitted the House that night, sinking under a sense of discouragement from which only true genius ever arouses itself for a second attempt.

We have now returned to our starting post: for such was the concatenation of events which rendered Sir George Downham, Bart., of Downham Hall, in spite of his noble estate, handsome person, and thirty years of age, the snarling and unsociable man described in our first chapter. Instead of persisting in his parliamentary career, as a really clever man would have done, the dissolution that unseated him, unseated him for life; and during the three or four years that succeeded the death of Lady Emily, he remained secluded in the country; —improving his property, shunning his neighbors, and seeing only as much of his two little girls as propriety and the head-nurse rendered indispensable.

At the close of the fourth year, however, little Helen, who taking more after her father than her mother, began to assert a will of her own, was not always to be prevented by the starch but worthy Mrs. Whitfield, from running after papa in the shrubberies, or even intruding into the library, whenever she discovered the door ajar as she crossed the hall from her daily walks; and the consequence was, that her delicate and timid younger sister, Blanche, who hung her little head when apostrophized by the harsh and dictatorial voice of Sir George, came to be a greater favorite. Her patient deference reminded the widower of her submissive mother. Helen had more of the Downham in her; or rather (he whispered it to himself only in the discreet seclusion of his chamber) more of the plebian vivacity of a Sm—th!

She was indeed a sparkling little creature: —light-footed, light-hearted,—with the carol of a bird, and spring of a squirrel. Her liveliness was wholly intuitive. For she saw no one but her taciturn father, except the grave old nurse, who always talked of that father as a Catholic of the Pope; but who, whenever, in the stillness of twilight, the children questioned her concerning their mother, and in a subdued voice, she ventured to speak of "my late poor dear lady, now a saint in Heaven," made the allusion with an air of commiseration, such as announced Lady Emily to the admiring nursery-maids as not only a saint, but a martyr.

To describe, meanwhile, the manner in which Sir George Downham occupied his days, months, and years, would be somewhat difficult. As became a pedant, he attributed the failure in parliament, which arose from want of ability, to want of application;—and down he sat, to study a multitude of authors and theories, which our practical country is beginning to understand the wisdom of forgetting. It was amazing the quantity of indigestible knowledge with which he managed to overburthen his brain; till it resembled one of those bonded warehouses, where goods are laid up, and eaten into by dust and rust, till wholly unfit for use.

Even the time of which he defrauded his folios to devote to his estate, was nearly as ill-bestowed. Too wild a theorist to allow time for his successive systems to get fairly into play, he was perpetually marring the setting of the fruit, by prematurely disturbing the blossom: so anxious to astonish the ignorant neighborhood by the superiority of his agriculture and horticulture, that he overshot his mark; and invariably contrived to exhibit the worst crops and sourest grapes in the county.

His nearest neighbor, Squire Watts of Doesbury Lodge, a busy stirring little country gentleman, never happier than when "getting a rise" out of the man of theories so self-conceited with his book-learning, was perpetually calling his attention to his failures. The baronet's waspishness was in fact a main source of delight to Probyn Watts,—whom, as if in compliment to the curtness necessitated by his bustling habits, every one in the county called "Pro;"—and provoking enough was it to a man so enamored of his own consequence as Sir George, to have it proved, in black and white, and figures of speech equally cogent, that, by his scientific farming, he lost a good thousand per annum!—

"My word for it, Downham," cried Pro., after one of his unceremonious surveys of the property, "by the time Miss Helen comes to the enjoyment of the estate, you'll have brought down its value by half! Your crochets frighten the good folks hereabouts. There's been one of your best farms lying fallow this year or more. Now take the advice of an experienced plain-sailing man, my dear Downham, and don't pretend to be wiser than your neighbors. Tisn't too late to mend your ways; and perhaps your turnips and beets 'll fetch, by and by, nearly as good prices as my own."

It was in some measure, the annoyance of being continually admonished by such a counsellor (a man in tops and corduroys, who had never had a peerage in his hand), which, in the fifth year of his widowhood, determined Sir George Downham to spend the season in town. The house in Curzon Street, of which he had taken a long lease during Lady Emily's life-

time, and relet for a term on her decease, was just then wanting a tenant.

On receiving, therefore, a letter from his house-agent, to enquire whether the "Capital mansion in Curzon Street fit for the immediate occupation of a nobleman or gentleman's family," were destined to figure once more among his advertisements, Sir George replied in the negative; at the same time apprising his household at Downham Hall, that they were about to remove to town for the season.

His first idea was that his little girls must necessarily bear him company. But Nurse Whitfield, in the exuberance of her joy at the prospect of revisiting London, marred their cause and her own!—On bringing in the young ladies after dinner to wish their papa good night, she suffered the glass of wine with which it was her master's ceremonious custom to regale her, so far to overcome her discretion, that she began to enlarge on the necessity of a complete renewal of their wardrobe, in order that they might present a suitable appearance to "my lord their grandpapa, and their aunt Lady Mary Hartley:"—on which hint, Sir George, whose pride recoiled from the notion of proclaiming in his household his utter alienation from the family of his deceased wife, decided that the same Barker who had originally incensed him by proclaiming the climate of Downham too damp for Lady Emily, should make atonement by pronouncing that her daughters had far better pass a wholesome spring in the country, than amid the dust and smother of London. And to a professional decree, Mrs. Whitfield, though sorely disposed to rebellion, was compelled to submit.

Immediately after Easter, therefore, and a paternal exhortation to the little girls to submit themselves to those in authority over them, (Nurse Whitfield to wit,) Sir George Downham proceeded to re-establish himself in the home he had quitted on the day of his wife's funeral; and though, throughout his journey, he indulged in the sense of emancipation which most men experience on escaping from their country-seat, as he approached the door signalised by an event so mournful, his spirits became gradually depressed. He dreaded the sight of that well-remembered corner of the drawing-room, where "poor Emily," established at her eternal needle-work, used to greet him on his return from the House. He dreaded the aspect of the dressing-room, where he had last beheld her in her grave-clothes. And it was not without a certain qualmishness of soul (from which even the most worldly-minded are not exempt under the influence of emotion,) that he re-entered as a widower the house, where, as a husband, he was conscious of having played so unworthy a part.

But the sensation of a remorseful choking in the throat, soon subsided. Not a trace of Lady Emily's footsteps remained on the spot. Five years' wear and tear of careless lessees, had destroyed the air of freshness and elegance derived from the presence of its fair young mistress. All was now worn and dingy.

He sat down to a solitary dinner, served as carelessly as a recently-removed household is apt to serve, even in the "best-regulated families;" and, missing the fair face which, in that dull dining-room, was wont to smile at him from an opposite seat, came to a conclusion characteristic of the sober sense of a man of thirty-five, that—

> A table richly spread,
> Without a lady at its head,

may be wanting in its chief attraction; but that a moderately spread table, wanting in companionship, is one of the dreariest solitudes in the world.

"After all, the best thing I could do for my comfort, would be to marry again," mused he, over a bottle of port as crusty as himself. "That confounded fit of the gout last winter at Downham, gave me some notion of what the country must become, when hunting and shooting are out of the question, and one has no pretext for closing one's doors against such savages as Pro. Watts and his wife!—Then as Helen and Blanche grow up, they will require some one to keep them in order; and with a competent step-mother, capable of superintending their education, old mother Whitfield would have no further pretext for boring me, as she has lately done, about the necessity for a nursery governess."

He thought, in short, only of himself, at a moment when most men would have dwelt only upon the past, and the lost angel by which it had been brightened; and the longer the new scheme was revolved in his head, the more plausible became the arguments that presented themselves in favor of a second marriage. An accidental encounter with Lord Glastonbury having satisfied him that the rancor of the old Earl was unabated, he did not contemplate without malicious joy, the possibility of inflicting on the Hartleys the disappointment they would naturally feel at seeing Lady Emily's offspring frustrated of their pretensions to the Downham estates, by the birth of a male heir; and the remembrance of former injuries spurred his flagging courage to the post.

But though conscious that the improvement of his worldly position by the death of his father, which at once trebled his income and enabled him to make a ladyship of his wife, entitled him to a far better match than when he had so daringly wooed the wealthy daughter of an Earl, Sir George had lost all ambition of an aristocratic alliance. He had had enough of matching above himself. He had experienced at Glastonbury Castle more heart-burnings than he cared to renew; and was now too well established in life to have need for what is called a prudent match. He enjoyed the proceeds of his daughters' fortune during their minority, as well as his own unencumbered estate, and could afford to please himself. Nor was it black, brown, or fair, that now engaged his interest. All he insisted upon was, an agreeable amenable companion; not too fiercely fenced round by family connexions; but disposed to content herself with that subordinate portion in life, which he held to be the allotted condition of womankind.

A man of his years, with a slight sprinkling of silver on his temples, had of course outlived the meretricious influence of ball-room temptations. Those angels in white tulle, enwreathed with garlands of roses, who haunt the dreams of ensigns in the Guards or cornets in the Household Brigade, had as little of womanhood in their nature, according to Sir George's estimation, as the queens or shepherdesses of painted sugar on a twelfth-cake. Nor were sprightly widows, pround of their jointures and their pleasantness, more to his taste.

"Too old a bird to be caught with chaff!" muttered he to himself one night, after a ball at ——— House, where he had been kept out of the dancing gallery, with malice prepense, by Mrs. Herbert Rhys, to listen to a pathetic description of her late husband's last moments at Nice, and the long tour she had been making in Italy to drive the afflicting scene from her mind. "'Tis a hard matter to preserve a serious countenance while these pretty impostors are playing their part. One might as well hope to be the dupe of a conjuror's tricks, after seeing them from a stage box!—For me, Heaven be praised! all illusion in such matters is at an end."

As if the wise Ulysses himself would have exercised the smallest command over his understanding, had his eyes and ears remained at the syren's mercy! As if Sir George Downham, who fancied himself so shrewd in his generation that he could see through the fairest face and form straight into the depths of the female heart, were not, like other moon-starers, liable to walk into a well!

And the well was closer at hand than he dreamed of! From the period of his re-establishment as a widower in Curzon-street, his interest had been strongly excited by the inhabitants of an opposite mansion, which had been rebuilt, refurnished, and relet during his country seclusion. The livery and arms upon the carriages of the owners were new to him. But from a certain sedateness in the air of the establishment, the look of the family wagon on their arrival in town for the season, and the class of visitors who left cards at the door, he inferred that his opposite neighbor was a country baronet, with an income equal to his own.

The house went like clock-work. To a second, day after day, did father, mother, and daughters, assemble in the eating-room, for breakfast, luncheon, or dinner. The carriage came to the door at the stroke of half-past three; the saddle-horses, at five. On Sunday, the whole family proceeded together on foot to the neighboring chapel, a tall footman carrying the velvet bag containing the bibles and prayer-books of the heads of the house; and had Sir George ever found the hall-lamp of his opposite neighbor unextinguished at the far from late hour he was in the habit of returning from his club, he would have felt inclined to warn the police that something was wrong.

When, therefore, at one of the late dinner parties of the season he heard announced immediately after his own, the names "Sir Felix and Lady Pomeroy, and the Miss Pomeroy's," and saw his opposite neighbors sail into the room, he began to recant all he had been saying to himself of the odiousness of his old-fashioned host and hostess, by whom their guests were in succession introduced to each other. He even forgave them the three couple and a half of country baronets they had previously added to his acquaintance, in favor of the new comers.

It was more difficult to forgive the two handsome girls, the *sang froid* with which they found themselves suddenly in collision with the man whom they could not but have noticed, of late, watching them from his drawing-room window more closely than was altogether consistent with good breeding. But for the coldness of the young ladies, he was amply repaid by the courtesy of their parents. Lady Pomeroy avowed a long-concealed passion for old Priam, a Newfoundland dog, that occasionally followed his horse in the park. While Sir Felix contrived to draw him off into a window as they were drinking their coffee; and, after loading him with a ton weight of the rubbish which country gentlemen call political argument, rewarded his patience by asking permission to avail himself of their close neighborhood by leaving a card at his door.

These lukewarm demonstrations, which, in their humdrum set passed for extreme cordiality, sufficed to complete the acquaintance. Visits were exchanged between the baronets. The girls proved as agreeable and talkative as they were handsome; and the widower soon found himself wondering how he could have lived so long with only two brick walls to divide them, without making a desperate assault upon their street door.

Accustomed to assist in doing the honors of a large country house, and form part of a family circle that included the friends of their brother the Guardsman, their brother the Templar, and their brother the Oxonian, (to say nothing of those of their uncles, General Sir Robert Pomeroy, and Admiral Sir Stephen,) they were qualified to discuss with grace and intelligence, those conventional topics which, though despised by the pedantic and over-wise, form, after all, the staple of ordinary conversation.

CHAPTER IV.

No one was at the trouble to banter him concerning his growing predilections. People were accustomed to see the Miss Pomeroys extensively escorted. Without unseemly effort or manœuvring to attract attention, there was everything in themselves and their position to create popularity. A young guardsman, indeed, among the idlers of the set, took upon himself to "wonder when that prosy fellow, old Downham, would make up his mind which of the sisters he was in love with;" probably because intent on disturbing his peace of mind by a counter-flirtation. But father, mother, and uncles, who had seen many a promising courtship in the family married by interference, were careful to leave the deliberate suitor to

himself; giving him simply the run of the house, as one among a hundred danglers after the girls. Had they understood the character of the man with whom they had to deal, they would have known that this sort of generalization was fatal to their views.

Sir George Downham, himself an only son, was unable to comprehend an enlargement of the sympathies such as belongs to the members of a numerous family. *His* notions of domestic affection exacted exclusive and unlimited devotion; and a woman who could interest herself in the destinies of the whole household brigade, and a considerable portion of the "junior branches of the aristocracy," as recorded in Dodd's Peerage, was to him an alarming personage.

Towards the close of the season, therefore, just as even Sir Felix and Lady Pomeroy were beginning to think it almost time he should have decided which of their handsome agreeable daughters were worthiest of his preference, his selfishness came to a conviction that both Sophia and her sister were too much in conceit with the world to believe, as poor Lady Emily had believed, in his more than papal infallibility; or renounce for his sake the pomps and vanities of fashionable life.

Instead, therefore, of accepting an invitation to visit Pomeroy Manor for the first week's partridge-shooting, for which he had almost canvassed, some weeks before, he resolved to let the intimacy he had cultivated subside decently into the tepid vagueness of mere acquaintance. With all his respect for the orderliness and substantiality of the Pomeroy establishment, there was no call upon his conscience to sacrifice the comfort of his own. In which conviction, he walked hastily across the street, one sultry afternoon, to excuse himself from accompanying Lady Pomeroy to Covent Garden the following night; to which end he had promised to dine with his opposite neighbours. When lo! a whisper interchanged on the subject between her ladyship and Sophia, sufficiently moved his curiosity to delay his apologies.

"If we all go to the play, mamma," he overheard the tall beauty observe to her mother, "what will become of Martha?"

"You know how much your cousin dislikes all that sort of thing," rejoined Lady Pomeroy. "She can remain at home with Sir Felix."

"Still as she only arrives to-morrow morning, and it is so long since she was with us, she may think it unkind if none of us remain to keep her company."

"Not very complimentary to your father, my love, to account him nobody! But as Martha chooses to come to us in town instead of at Pomeroy Manor, as I proposed, so as literally to make a hotel of the house, (for she is only on her way through London from the admiral's to her aunt at St. Leonard's,) she cannot expect you to give up your engagements on her account."

"I don't think she ever expects anything, poor girl!" rejoined Martha's fair partizan. "But if you have no objection, I should really like to remain at home with her, the evening of her arrival."

Instead of being struck by the fact that the frank good nature of Sophia, by which he had been shocked when extended to youthful Honorables and Captains in the Guards, was quite as much at the service of one who, by Lady Pomeroy's ignominious mention, appeared to be some poor relation, Sir George Downham experienced only a movement of curiosity concerning this forlorn girl, who "expected" nothing; but who was an object of preference to Sophia over himself and one of Shakspeare's *chef-d' œuvres*. He made up his mind, therefore, to adhere to his engagement.

On first entering the drawing-room, he had reason to suppose that, thanks to an earlier hour than usual in compliment to the playgoers, the ladies had not yet made their appearance. For Sir Felix was reading the evening paper at the window; while his son, the guardsman, lounged upon the sofa, half-hidden behind the double sheet of the "Times." But as they turned to welcome him, the slight movement of replacing on a table covered with showy illustrated works, a volume with which she had been amusing herself, attracted his attention to a demure damsel, a mere girl, whom Sir Felix carelessly named to him as "my niece, Miss Pomeroy."

The only "Miss Pomeroy" he had ever seen in that room, who did not instantly follow up an introduction to a stranger by a volley of gracious phrases—signifying nothing! Coloring to the roots of her hair, the poor relation, by way of cultivating his acquaintance, muttered something about wondering whether her cousins were dressed, and glided out of the room!—Neither her uncle nor his son appeared to notice her disappearance. Martha was evidently of as little consequence in the house as the chair on which she had been seated!—

Nevertheless, from his place on the dinner table between Lady Pomeroy and her eldest daughter, Sir George found leisure to decide that the shy girl seated opposite, whose color rose whenever he looked towards her, was so pleasing in appearance as to render it highly prudential on the part of her uncle and aunt to abridge her visits in a house full of unmarried cousins of either sex.

While the Miss Pomeroys were looking for their fans and opera-glasses on the announcement of the carriage, he contrived to express his regrets to the timid stranger, that she should object to join their party to the theatre; an embarrassed smile, as she listened, encouraging him to add, that "he was afraid since she was so determined a recluse, her stay in London would be short!"

"I am here only for a day or two," said she. "Having never been at any place of public amusement, I can feel no dislike to them. But my uncles and aunts do not approve of my imbibing a taste for expensive pleasures."

"I understood," said Sir George almost coloring in his turn at her candor, "that one of your cousins was to remain at home and keep you company!"

"Sophia was so kind as to wish it. But I would not hear such a thing. Surely being

left at home, in a room full of books and music, is no such very great privation?"

While giving his arm to Lady Pomeroy as far as the carriage, the well-read baronet thought of course of Lady Jane Grey; and perhaps fancied how well he should fill the character of Roger Ascham:—and between the acts of "As you like it," had no difficulty in extracting from the two out-spoken girls, to whom he still pretended to devote himself, that their cousin was the orphan daughter of a clergyman, their father's youngest brother, whose portionless children had fallen upon the mercies of the family.

"Martha has been brought up in the country by Admiral Pomeroy and his wife," said Sophia; "and never leaves them, except when invited by some other uncle or aunt."

"Poor girl! she does not appear to have a *very* extended notion of the pleasures of life!" said Sir George carelessly.

"There were so many of them," added Sophia—"(eight children wholly unprovided for!) that my father and uncles have been more intent on bestowing education and professions on the boys, than on amusing their sisters."

"Most wisely, most kindly! But still, when this poor girl finds herself in the way of the pleasures apportioned to her age and class"—

"Surely," interrupted Sophia, "occasional enjoyment of pleasures beyond our reach, is more likely to become a source of discontent, than an advantage?—Poor Martha would scarcely be happier in her quiet country village, for having enjoyed what we are now enjoying."

"In that case, you must deny all advantage in the extension of human intelligence, or the cultivation of the human mind?" pleaded Sir George gravely.

"To say the truth," said Miss Pomeroy, in a lower voice, as if afraid that her mother might be annoyed by overhearing the subject discussed,—"Martha's sister Maria spent a spring with us in town, some years ago, when my sister and I were children; and unluckily became an object of attachment to my eldest brother. Papa would not hear of the match, for Robert was only twenty; and there was neither money nor connection in the case, to reconcile his parents to the folly of an early marriage."

"And was this long before his union with Lady Harriet Hurst?"—

"Some years. He was sent abroad, and all sorts of coldness and disagreements arose in the family. The end of it was, that Maria Pomeroy married the curate of her parish; and papa has ever since adhered to his determination never to have another niece visiting in the house with his sons."

"Instead of being surprised, therefore, that your pretty cousin is not here with us to-night, I ought to be amazed at her being in Curzon-Street at all?"

"Exactly!" replied Miss Pomeroy, laughing. "After all, it *is* a risk: for she is, as you say, extremely pretty; and John and Arthur are not less susceptible than their neighbors."

The recommencement of the performance fortunately put an end to the discussion. But Sir George kept pondering over what he had heard; and as it chanced that, the following day, some lady of their acquaintance was going to give what Lady Pomeroy's maid called, one of her ladyship's "*musinees maticales*," he felt pretty sure that when the family coach set forth upon its dusty pilgrimage, and Sir Felix mounted his horse for a solitary ride, the poor relation would remain moping at home.

He took care, therefore, to possess himself of Miss Pomeroy's fan, previous to leaving the theatre; and when, next day, his prognostications were verified, the family butler, who saw in him the future husband of one of his master's daughters, readily admitted him on the plea of having a packet to remit to their cousin.

Little did the respectable functionary surmise how much of human weal or woe might arise from the hopes, fears, and projects, engendered by that single *tete-a-tete!*

Sir Felix Pomeroy was a prosperous English country gentleman, the even tenor of whose life was composed of the most common-place incidents. There was consequently some pretext for the round-eyed wonder with which, three days after this furtive visit, he listened to the explanations of Sir George Downham; in the course of a private audience which he had granted in the full persuasion that his opposite neighbor was come to demand the hand of one of his daughters.

There was nothing unfair or flagitious in his paternal projects. Each of his girls had been sought in marriage by good men and true—in every respect the equal of Sir George,—whom he had never pressed on their acceptance; and he was prepared to give to either of them, on her marriage, a portion of twenty thousand pounds. It was only, therefore, because he believed his opposite neighbor to be a superior man, who would secure the utmost credit and happiness to his wife, that he listened with a degree of consternation worthy the repeal of the Corn Laws, to the offer of Downham Hall and its master to the orphan of his brother the parson!

"I perceive, my dear Sir Felix," observed Sir George, "that you consider me a little precipitate; and were not your charming niece on the eve of quitting town, I should have so far controlled my feelings as to afford her an opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the man who expects his future happiness at her hands, before I presumed to put her feelings towards me to the proof."

"Still, an acquaintance of four or five days," stammered the astonished baronet———

"An acquaintance of many months with those who are nearest and dearest to her," interrupted Sir George, "has rendered me fully alive to the advantage of being connected with your family; and you can scarcely be surprised, my dear Sir Felix, at my seizing the only channel by which I could possibly hope to establish an alliance between us."

His dear Sir Felix looked puzzled. But as

it was clear that a compliment of some kind or other was intended, it was safer to receive it with a bow.

"I could not expect," persisted Sir George, in explanation, "to make a man of my age and family incumbrances acceptable to young ladies like your daughters; who, to the gifts of youth and beauty, add those of fortune and personal consequence. Whereas their amiable cousin, less lovely and less accomplished, may be induced perhaps to put up with my deficiencies, in favor of the home and protection of which I find she is in need."

"This, then," thought the confused Sir Felix, "was the meaning of the visit to the Grosvenor Gallery yesterday, and of Downham's insisting that Martha should be of the party. Lady Pomeroy thought him so good-natured in explaining the pictures to her, and all on Sophia's account! Whereas, after all, he was quietly offering Martha his hand and five or six thousand a-year. A fine lesson to my girls!"

To the latter, however, the announcement, though certainly a surprise, was neither a lesson nor a blow. By Sophia and her sister, Sir George Downham and his selfish pragmaticality had long been voted a bore. If either of them had the slightest wish to bring his attentions to the crisis of a proposal, it was simply that he might be refused and dismissed; the feelings of both sisters being honestly conveyed in the exclamation with which Sophia received from her mother the intimation that "that artful girl Martha had cut them out, and was about to become Lady Downham of Downham Hall!"

"And a capital thing for her, dear mamma! Martha, who has no other attachment, will be very happy with Sir George, and make him an excellent wife."

The fact was, that both the tall beauties *had* "attachments," and had used their pompous hanger-on as a screen to attentions more agreeable to themselves than to their father and mother; under which circumstances, they were unaffectedly glad that poor Martha should have obtained so eligible a home. She was a person concerning whom their consciences smote them. With fewer brothers and fewer engagements, they would have been kind cousins to her; and when, after Sir George Downham's proposals had been accepted in form, and she was released from the library where Sir Felix and Lady Pomeroy endeavored to crush her into nothingness by the stateliness of their congratulations on her unlooked for and unmerited good fortune, the two girls cheered her up again, by assuring her that Sir George bore the highest character, and possessed a beautiful place in Suffolk.

"You will of course be married from this house!" said Sophia, who had reasons of her own for wishing their stay in London to be protracted.

"And it will require some little time to get up your *trousseau*," added her sister.

"*My* trousseau will of course be of a very simple description!" said the systematically humble Martha.

Upon which, her cousin Sophia made the best of her way to the library, and by well-timed and spirited assurances to her father and mother, that if they did not warmly espouse the cause of the future Lady Downham, it would be surmised that they were disappointed at finding their niece preferred to their daughters, contrived to return to her cousin furnished with a cheque for 300*l.* upon Drummonds,' as a gift from Sir Felix for the purchase of wedding-clothes.

"You must allow us the pleasure of assisting you to choose them, my dear Martha," said Sophia.

"And of officiating as bridesmaids at the wedding," kindly added her sister.

And the poor relation, till then as shamefaced from the consciousness of having purloined the intended husband of one or other of her handsome cousins, as if she had been caught in the act of making away with one of their bracelets or gold chains, felt full of compunction at finding them thus generously forgiving.

"Sir George Downham has half-a-dozen children who are kept in solitary confinement at his country seat," observed her cousin the Guardsman, in a tone that savored a little of piques, after adding his congratulations to those of his sisters. "But I suppose, Patty, he has told you all about them? The way I came to hear of this pleasing incumbrance on his estate, was, that the world which at this time of year would make up a match between two poplar trees if they stood whispering together in the same wind, chose to join his name with Sophy's; on which, Hartley of ours (a very good fellow when one gets him out of a checked-shirt or the cricket-ground) began to bore me to death, every time he could lay hold of me on guard, about saying a good word to the future Lady Downham in favor of his nephews and nieces."

"Nieces!" emended Martha, with a faint smile, but more firmly than she would have ventured to address one of her cousins the day before. "Sir George has two pretty little girls, who will be a great resource to me at Downham Hall."

"How pat she has got her lesson!" thought Captain Pomeroy, "considering that, a week ago, the very name of Downham was as strange to her as that of the burgomaster of Utrecht! —Amazing with what facility women conform to their destinies."

And so it certainly was. Not a deeper tinge of color on her cheek, not a faltering intonation in her voice, evinced the consciousness of obligation. Had she been in possession of eight thousand per annum for the last ten years, she could not have risen more rapidly to the level of her lot.

Little did she suspect the advantage she obtained in the eyes of Downham by this cool self-possession. All he had feared, in entrusting his credit and consequence to the keeping of the poor relation of a stuffy country baronet, was lest excessive gratitude should betray her into abjectness: not in his eyes,—for that he would readily have forgiven; but in those of the sneering clique whose speculations he had disappointed.

Throughout the preparation for the wedding, therefore, her composure enchanted him. The frigid smiles with which she accepted the cadeaux and congratulations of her uncles, the General and Admiral, so as to freeze upon their lips the homilies they came prepared to inflict on their portionless niece, were not more amazing to her cousins than pleasing to himself; and when, after the usual routine of settlement-signing, trousseau-packing, parade of bridesmaids, and wedding breakfast, they entered the travelling-carriage and four, which was to convey them on their bridal tour, he felt twice as proud of his bride as, under similar circumstances, of the Right Honorable daughter of an Earl.

A month's tour was to divide the wedding-day of the circumspect couple from their instalment at home. For Sir George chose to give time to his young bride to accustom herself to her matronly estate, before she assumed her post as stepmother; and great, during that interesting interval, was the excitement that prevailed at Downham Hall. Contrary to custom, on such occasions, the second marriage of Sir George produced unqualified delight in his household.

Since the death of Lady Emily, "Master" had become far more strict and careful than in those pleasant dinner-giving times, when, according to his butler's account, he lived like a gentleman: and on the return of Macpherson, the head gardener, in the month of May, from London, (where he had betaken himself and his peaches, forced at Sir George's expense to contend for a horticultural prize,) when the canny Scotchman brought back news that the widower was about to be married to a "handsome young leddy, of graund femmily, whose parents kept half-a-dozen flunkies in purple and plush,"—the servants' hall, and even the village, drank heartily to the health of the future bride.

In fitting course, arrived the baronet's instructions for the sweeping and garnishing of the family mansion; accompanied by a missive to Mrs. Whitfield, instructing her to prepare his little daughters for welcoming their new mamma. And as the name of "Miss Pomeroy," contained in both dispatches, corresponded exactly with Macpherson's foreshowings, even the head nurse could not forbear rejoicing with the petty pride of the upper servant of a great house, that "my lady's place" was about to be occupied by "a lady born."

On the whole, indeed, she preferred a baronet's daughter to any other rank of life that could have been selected. A baronet's daughter was just sufficiently inferior to an earl's to understand the full value of the Right Honorable pertaining to the name of her predecessor; without degrading her Right Honorable Ladyship's offspring by contact with plebeian blood!

"Papa will perhaps spend more time at home, *now*," said Helen, with a joyful glance towards her sister.

But Blanche, who, though a year younger in age, was considerably the senior in ripeness of thought and feeling, was not to be so easily diverted from her first painful impression. She retained no remembrance of her mother. But her instinctive tenderness of nature had managed to wring out of nurse Whitfield's reminiscences many and many an anecdote of "dear mama."

Blanche was the favorite of the nurse, as the more lively Helen of the rest of the household. Fair as daylight, her nearly colorless hair, and light blue eyes, seemed to justify the name of "Moonlight" bestowed upon her by Pro. Watts and his wife, to distinguish her from the brilliant sister to whom her poor mother had assigned the name of "Little Sunshine."

"But for my part, ma'am," Mrs. Whitfield had taken upon herself to observe to Mrs. Watts, on hearing the epithet jestingly used by the Squire, "I don't like to make common talk of my poor dear sainted lady's words or notions! And if you knew the dear children as well as I do, ma'am, you wouldn't think we rated them too high in the *new* names we've found for them at the Hall. Mr. Barker, I b'lieve was the *first* to say it; but among our own folks, ma'am, Miss Helen and Miss Blanche are always called the Diamond and the Pearl."

CHAPTER V.

The children, attired in their best frocks, the footmen in their new liveries, and the head nurse arrayed in all the supremacy of traditionary consequence, might be eager for a sight of the beautiful and stately baronet's daughter, about to preside over their destinies. But among the most anxious for a glimpse of her, were Pro. Watts and his wife.

"And what conclusions have you formed respecting our new neighbors," she enquired of the Squire, who, after the ceremony of an exchange of cards with Downham Hall, had in the course of a day or two hurried off on his shooting pony to invade the privacy of the newly-married couple, at so early an hour after breakfast as to leave no pretext for the announcement of "not at home."—"Is Lady Downham as amiable as our dear Lady Emily?—Has she an air of intellectuality?—Is she likely to prove a valuable neighbor?"—

But poor Pro. whose face was burnished by an August sun at noonday, into the semblance of a copper *casserole*, kept wiping his forehead in a cool corner of the library, incapable of speech.

"Is she, at all events a *fine* woman?" reiterated Mrs. Pro., attacking a point peculiarly apt to stir up the eloquence of her husband.

"A *fine* woman?—not five foot in her shoes!"—ejaculated he, with an upward glance at the towering proportions of his accomplished spouse.—"A poor little diminutive thing: yet with as much determination, not to say obstinacy, expressed in her thin lips, as though she'd been used to command a regiment of dragoons!"—

"You are apt to be sadly precipitate in your judgements, my dear Probyn," rejoined the lady,—who alone of all the county vouchsafed a couple of syllables to the Squire. "I rejoice, however, that since Sir George has selected so juvenile a partner, her countenance exhibits some promise of firmness. Those sweet children are advancing towards an age when the domination of a prudent hand"—

"Ay, ay, ay!—Poor dears!—They'll be plagued and domineered over enough, I'll warrant 'em!—My lady has Mrs. Uppercrust written in her looks, if ever the lines of a face spoke truth!—I promise you that when old mother Whitfield brought in the young ladies, instead of looking as she usually does, as grand as the Queen of Sheba come to wait on King Solomon, in some old piece of Flemish tapestry, she made her appearance curtseying to her new lady, as though she'd been a duchess in grain!"

"For her situation in life, Mrs. Whitfield has a considerable sense of propriety," replied the Squire's lady. "She is aware that it becomes her to give an example of respect to Lady Downham, to her little step daughters."

"As if Downham himself didn't keep 'em at distance enough!" cried the warm-hearted Squire. "I'm sure I never saw children less made of! However, there's one good I foresee from this second marriage. The Hartleys can't go on overlooking them *now*. Lord Glastonbury *must* feel it his duty, as soon as a new family is talked about, to bestir himself a little about the interest of his granddaughters."

Lord Glastonbury, however, did nothing of the kind. As Sir George had not seen fit to make a formal announcement to the Hartley family, of his new alliance, they chose to know nothing about the matter. The Earl retained too strong a grudge against his son-in-law, to make any effort towards a renewal of intercourse; justifying his neglect of his grand children by asserting, that "Sir George, though a mighty disagreeable man, had far too much self respect not to fulfil, with strict integrity, his duty as a parent."

Lady Mary, too, was too much occupied in adjusting the velvet jacket and point lace collar of her beautiful little Lord Hartingham, and adding olive branches to her family tree, to do more than express her satisfaction to all whom it might concern, that "poor Emily's girls would no longer be left to the care of servants." And there was consequently no one to exhibit particular interest in the subject (except the intermeddling couple at Doesbury Lodge), when, a few months prior to the event which might possibly give a male heir to the Hall, Lady Downham, after making strong professions in the first instance, of her desire to undertake the education of Helen and Blanche, became suddenly aware of the necessity for a governess.—Mrs. Whitfield was consequently apprised by her master, that her salary of forty guineas a-year would be converted into a retiring pension of twenty pounds, and complimented *out of the house*.

"*My Lady, I suspect*, don't care to have two head nurses in the house," observed the Squire, when he communicated this piece of gossip to his wife; "and for some reasons best known to their two selves, mother Whitfield's curtsies ar'nt quite so humble as they used to be. At least, that's as much as I could make out in explanation of a letter addressed to "Mrs. X Y Z, to the care of Messrs. Hatchard," which I saw Downham scuffle into the letter bag before we went to luncheon this morning; and when I told him, that if there was any thing about a governess in the wind, he'd far better refer to *you* than Hatchard, for that you were a patroness of the governesses' Institution, and correspond with Mrs. Euphrasia Primwell, the talented authoress of the "Schoolrooms of England," and "Matronhood considered in its Social Relations," and a power of other Mothers' Own Books,—who had always some promising *protegee* to dispose of,—he thanked me drily, and told me Lady Downham had already made her arrangements."

The fact was, that the fore-sighted stepmother had already managed to establish her influence over the children, on whose submissiveness depended so much of her happiness, by being the first to emancipate them from nursery thraldom. Regarding her stepdaughters as necessary evils entailed upon her acquirement of an honorable independence, she resolved to render them as little evils as possible, by living on happy terms with those with whom live she must.

It was indispensable to get rid of the presumptuous old woman, who, from the moment she discovered her mistake concerning Lady Downham's birth and parentage, and that she was "only a poor parson's daughter, after all," had taken upon herself to enlarge too frequently on "the rules established by the young ladies' own sainted mamma, the late Lady Emily Downham."

The proud old servant took care, of course, to circulate an opinion in the household, that she had tendered her resignation rather than have anything to do with the impending young family; and before she took her final leave of the house, managed to place the little girls on their guard against the new mamma, who, after speaking them so fairly, had already turned them over to a governess; and would leave no stone unturned to alienate from them in favor of their future brothers and sisters the affections of their surviving parent.

It was in vain that Mrs. X Y Z (who proved to be a sensible amiable woman, though less addicted to hard words than Mrs. Euphrasia Primwell's erudite *protegees*) endeavored to eradicate the prejudice thus foolishly created. So prompt is human nature to rebel against all constituted authority, and so instinctive is our jealousy of those who replace by election the dear ones connected with us by natural ties, that the little girls soon ceased to hang about their "new mamma." At the close of six months and a great deal of indulgence, they were far more distant with her than at first; and their shyness begat coldness in return. By the time the baby (to the utter disappointment and vexation of Sir George, again only a

daughter!) came to be the pet of the drawing-room, Helen and Blanche were permanently established in the school-room.

The well spoken lady of poor Pro. bustled about the neighborhood, belauding in her choicest English the conscientious self-government of her neighbor at the Hall; till the common run of listeners and talkers, so apt to believe what is plausibly related, and relate again all they believe, established her reputation as the best of step-mothers, and decided that old heads were sometimes to be found on young shoulders.—They were almost as much in love with her as Sir George.

Even her two tall handsome cousins, when they accompanied Sir Felix and Lady Pomeroy to spend a few pompous days at the Hall, admitted that Martha had managed her affairs with a degree of tact for which they gave her little credit, when first Sir George Downham picked up a diamond in their barnyard.

Notwithstanding, however, the philosophical manner in which the lady of the Hall was judged by her cousins, neither of these daughters of prosperity possessed the means of measuring the depth of selfishness engendered by such a position as to have passed through childhood without an endearment, and girlhood without an encouraging word. The parson's orphan, having received by way of code that, being left to the tender mercies of the world, she must learn to "shift for herself," and that her sole aim in life must be to "do the best she could for herself," had come to regard the most sacred relations of life as a good or bad bargain.—Scarcely any other girl of eighteen would have been kept waking a whole night, when her settlements were in progress, by the discovery effected by her uncle's lawyers, that, failing male issue by her marriage. by virtue of the will of the late Sir Jeremiah, the Downham estates must descend to the offspring of his eldest grand-daughter, and those of Blanche in due succession, to the exclusion of a daughter of her own; and few, let us hope, are the mothers capable of feeling as she did, on learning that her firstborn was of the weaker sex, that she would as soon it were born dead as born a girl!—

Sir George, who, like most men wonderfully wise in their own conceit, was thoroughly blind to the motives of the plausible wife who possessed such unlimited influence over his mind, attributed her unconcealed disappointment to mere deference to his wishes.

"It is because her considerate foresight would fain have spared me a repetition of the annoyance of having a governess established in the house," said he, when Pro. Watts expressed some surprise that Lady Downham should exhibit such moderate satisfaction in her little Louisa. "By the time Helen and Blanche grow up, instead of being able to get rid of Mrs. Temple, (the confounded morality-monger who keeps watch over the etiquette and grammar of the house,) the whole torment will have to be renewed; and for the next eighteen years Downham Hall might as well be a boarding-school!—

"I'm sure I wish I could say the same of Doesbury Hall," rejoined the hearty Squire. "I like nothing half so well as having young people about me! And my wife, who has wonderful notions on the subject of education, would have brought up her daughters at home if she'd had as many as Queen Hecuba, though she considers that boys can't be kept too close at school; so that my boy Jack (whom she brought twice through the Latin grammar before he was six years old) has only his two short holidays in the year. I often think I'd give my little finger for a sight of the dear fellow's face!—However, I've the comfort of knowing he's at the head of his class, and will be soon at the head of his school; and some day or other, his masters tell me, we shall hear news of a certain Master John Watts, that will, may be, surprise us."

The worthy Squire's enthusiastic affection for his son was, however, far outdone by that of the Downhams, when, the following year, the chimes of their parish church, and volleys of squibs and crackers in the market-place of Doesbury, announced that, at length, an heir was born to the estate! When he saw a handsome boy bearing his patronymic borne to the baptismal font, Sir George began to feel that the financial shabbiness of the old banker and his own wranglings, had not been struggled through in vain. To these family honors, there was at length a successor! Whether the three little Misses Downham lived or died, the name would have inheritors in the land; while the calculating mother worshipped the cockade on the cap of the new little Christian, as symbolic of a baronetcy and an estate of eight thousand a-year.

From that day forth, the son and heir, (be-Georged of course after his father,—but having the name of Pomeroy super-added, for distinction sake, to that of George;) engrossed the whole attention of his parents. Nothing was too costly for his nursery. His portrait was taken before his face could boast more features than a kitten's; and Sophia Pomeroy and her sister, now happy wives and mothers, were often amused to notice in the Lilliputian warehouses and other maternal vanity-traps of London, rich costumes of overweening pretension, destined to "Master Downham, of Downham Hall."

At the Hall, of course, this species of heir-worship excited little censure; the name of Downham carrying with it sufficient respect in the neighborhood, to render it a matter of urgency that it should be preserved from extinction. Pro. Watts was the only person who chuckled over the folly of the baronet and his wife, in fancying their gosling so much more like an eagle than other people's. He even ventured to hint to Sir George, that when *his* Jack cut his front tooth, it had not been made a matter of inquiry and gratulation throughout the county, as when Master George Pomeroy Dowham accomplished a similar effort. Nor did poor Pro. reconcile himself to the idea, that those whom he still called "poor dear Lady Emily's two darlings," were frustrated of their inheritance, till he saw how amply the blessing of a little sister repaid them for their loss;

Lady Downham's neglected Louisa being the joy of their lives.

Lady Mary Hartley, who, if not exactly a paragon of sisters and aunts, was a devoted wife and attached mother, was enjoying meanwhile, during the pupilage of her nieces, all the happiness to be derived from the sunshine of this world's pleasures.

It is true that Lord Glastonbury with whom she resided, and who grew in childishness as he grew in years, had still sufficient sense remaining to know that, much as he had desired her to become the mother of a son, she was now mother to more children, male and female, than comported with her welfare or his own comfort. And when every year brought a fresh olive-branch (so named, Heaven knows why, since such branches are rarely symbolical of peace), he could not help sometimes reminding her, that though her fortune and the barony of Hartingham provided for her eldest, the little Hartleys who were bringing up his rear, "not single spies, but in battalions," were likely to be as penniless as their father before them.

But Lady Mary was too happy in her home and household, to discern evils in prospect. The brilliant sun over her head was too vertical to admit of a shadow. And whenever the old Earl adverted to his age as a ripe one, and to his brother the Bishop as a closefist, who would make his own large family a plea for doing nothing for that of his predecessor, she flew to impress an affectionate kiss on his forehead,—assuring him, that like an Eastern sultan, he would live forever; and that her children, by getting over the onerous period of education under his roof or at his cost, would, when it pleased the Almighty to remove him, be qualified to push their own way in the world.

Still, the old Earl persisted in his warnings; —more especially in the dogdays, when his house in St. James's Square was too hot to hold himself and a couple of public schoolboys, during the midsummer holidays. For now that to their number three little sisters were added, Lady Mary was far too busy to pen the noisy miscreants in their fold. Perhaps, since her father's threats produced so inadequate an effect, she might be sanguine enough to imagine that, in spite of his lavish habits of hospitality, both at Glastonbury and in town, he was laying by money out of his income for the benefit of her children. But this was so far from being the case, that he was at length heard to hint, that unless she assisted him to retrench their expenses, the depression of the agricultural interest might perhaps render it impossible to meet the expenses of the coming year.

Her husband, when apprized of these prudent counsels, was sure to reply, that the "governor had always been a croaker; that he only wished them to pull in, because his agent wanted to keep his income in his hands, in order that, in the end, for his credit's sake, the old gentleman might cut up fat." But Tom Hartley was the last man in the world to promote economy. Jovial as a Colonel as he had been thoughtless as an Ensign, he brought home daily to dinner from the tennis-court or club, two or three friends as convivial as himself, so as to convert their family circle into a pleasant party.

It followed, of course, that Colonel Hartley was one of the most popular men in the Guards; and that the stumpy figure and round back of Lady Mary were more admired by his friends than the charms of many a reigning beauty. The Colonel, indeed, went so far as to protest, that not one among his sixty or eighty bosom-friends, but would, according to the vulgar and most fallacious dictum, "go through fire and water to serve him:"—seeing which, he continued to warm them with the fires and assuage their drought with the claret, of his noble father-in-law.

At present, it was Lord Hartingham rather than his juniors who suffered by his parents' folly. The young lord, whose velvet jacket would have been advantageously exchanged for the broadcloth of a school-boy, was, on some pretence or other, always at home. At fifteen, the private tutor who had been despatched to Eton with him chiefly for the gratification of his mother's foolish vanity, gave him up as a bad job. But whereas, if he had learned nothing else under shelter of the distant spires and antique towers, he was the best swimmer of his form, and as fine a hand at the wicket as ever turned out of Brocas, his father decided that Dr. Waterman's fulminations were "nothing but confounded humbug;" and instead of getting him crammed for college by some patent dunce-driver, suffered him to lounge in St. James's Square; accompanying him to Lord's, the tennis-court, the billiard-room, or betting upon sailing matches in his Thames yacht.

The precocious youth was even welcomed, in compliment to his lady mother, to ball-rooms where he was full five years too young to show his handsome face; and Lord Hartingham came to be as well known as any other young man about town, at a period when his existence ought to have been a problem to all but the peerage and his tutor. Colonel Hartley, unlike most fathers whose career is not a model of discretion, seemed by no means to insist upon higher aims on the part of his son.

It was in consequence of inexcusable follies on the part of the elder yatcher and tennis-player (for to these occupations his profession was a subordinate part), that it became desirable to effect the sale of a portion of Lady Mary's estate; which, as adjoining the property of her little nieces, was of course of more value to them than to a stranger.

"Sir George Downham ought to give you twice as much for Willersley as any other person," was his lawyer's suggestion, when the necessity of the sale became imminent. Whereupon the gamesome Colonel, who had no more delicacy in his nature than a hippopotamus, began to upbraid his wife with having neglected her brother-in law and nieces; suggesting that she should immediately write and give him the refusal of the farms.

"Far better sell them to somebody else, my dear Tom," was her frank reply. "We have been so ungracious to the Downhams, that they would be justified in calling it a shabby thing if, after fourteen years' cessation of intercourse,

I were to write only to make a good bargain out of them."

"It is Downham's own fault. He never wrote to your father to announce his second marriage."

"How could he, considering the terms we were upon!"

"And whose fault were the *terms?*"

"At all events, as I have sought no renewal of intimacy, I should not like to make the first advance from interested motives."

Too good-natured to persist in opposition to the wife usually so tractable, Hartley left the room to delegate the negociation to the hands of the lawyer by whom it had been proposed. And it was consequently to her son, who lounged on the sofa beside her turning over a collection of H. B.'s, that Lady Mary, half-musingly observed, "My poor sister's eldest girl must now be more than seventeen, (for she is nearly two years older than you, my dear Hartingham!) —And to think that I have never seen her since she was three years old!"

"Of course not! Her people are snobs, I fancy, who live entirely in the country!"

"Yes; Sir George took the world in dudgeon from not finding himself so great a man as he wished to be thought."

"Yet, by Jove, he must be a clever fellow to prevail on his wife and daughters to listen all the year round to the cawing of his rooks. These cousins of mine will make capital wives for some fellow or other, one of these days!" observed the Sardanapalus of sixteen. "The Tyranny at Downham Hall must be a famous school for young ladies."

A speech applauded by a burst of laughter from his mother; though she qualified her applause by remarking that "some fellow or other" would never be found in his own person; since, if ever he married, it must be to add to their family arms a scutcheon of pretence.

Some months afterwards, a formal refusal on the part of Sir George Downham, as trustee for his daughters, to purchase Lady Mary's moiety of the late Countess of Glastonbury's estate, and the transfer of the property to other hands, having placed her conscience at ease, Lady Mary addressed a few lines to her brother-in-law;—avowing her disinclination to let a matter of business produce a renewal of acquaintance with those so nearly allied to her; and adding, that, now their several families were grown up, it would be most agreeable to her that the cousins should be on cousinly terms. Her father, she said, was growing infirm; and would be exceeding gratified by a sight of his grand-daughters, when next Sir George and Lady Downham visited town.

"Admire, my dear, the cunning and audacity of all this!" was Sir George's commentary on the letter, which he instantly brought into his wife's dressing-room. "During the short time I was connected with these people, nothing but the firmness of my character prevented their crushing me into nothing; and for the last twelve years, not a syllable has been vouchsafed me by the family! And now, forsooth, because that fool Hartley has run out and is over head and ears in debt, they first endeavor to befool me into the purchase of their encumbered estate; and then, when they find me beforehand with them, discover that my daughters will make good matches hereafter for one or other of their lackland sons, to reunite the family property!—As if a few sweet words could obliterate years of bitterness!"

"Your view of the case is no doubt a correct one," replied Lady Downham, following up her system of coinciding in the first instance with the man she never failed to bring round to her own opinions; "though their memory must be short, indeed, if they fancy you the sort of man to be taken for a dupe! Still, my dear George, estimating these Hartleys and their motives at their real value, might it not be a little unwise to reject their overtures! The family connection may prove an advantage to the dear girls."

"Always considering their welfare!"—ejaculated their father, gazing with complacency on her insinuating face;—"ever eager that all possible sacrifices should be made for their sake! Still, my dear, you cannot wish to see me incur the humiliation of snatching at the first olive-branch tendered by these people!"

"I would not for worlds," said she, "have you take *any* step which could in the smallest degree compromise your self-respect. Still, as Pro. Watts and other gossips in this neighborhood have whispered that you are kept at arm's length by Lady Mary and her husband, and that there is no indignity to which Lord Glastonbury has not exposed you—"

"Pro. Watts says *that?*"—cried Sir George, with kindling eyes.

"You know how freely he talks of matters concerning which he knows nothing! Why expect good manners or good sense from a bumpkin, who has seen the world only from behind the hedges of his estate!"

"At all events, it may be as well to put a stop to his impertinence by affording him a glimpse of this precious letter."

"Certainly—certainly!" interrupted Lady Downham. "And as he is fully convinced that all intercourse between your family and the Hartleys is closed for ever, I should really like to see his face of astonishment when I have to inform him next Autumn, that, on our way through town to the Isle of Wight, the dear girls were presented to their grandfather!"

One which hint, Sir George sat down to reply to the proposition of Lady Mary Hartley, in a far more courteous spirit than might have been expected.

The visit to the Isle of Wight, adverted to by Lady Downham, was an indulgence claimed for her son, at the instigation of Barker the apothecary; who knew enough of the family politics, to be certain that it was only by prescribing sea-air and sea-bathing for the heir-apparent, he should secure them for the unfortunate little Louisa, who, delicate from her birth, was beginning to exhibit symptoms of spinal deformity.

At the Isle of Wight, however, while the heir-apparent was galloping his pony on the sands by the side of Lady Downham's barouche, the little invalid recovered her bloom and spirits, unobserved by all but her loving sisters.

"After all, papa and mamma were right in saying that nothing was the matter which change of air would not remove!" observed Blanche, one day, when Louisa had been taking her former active part in their pastimes. "We were unjust to Lady Downham."

"Do you wish to know my *real* opinion?" inquired Helen, after certifying by careful investigation, that the doors were shut, and no one within hearing.

"What opinions of yours but *real* ones, dearest Nell, have I ever known?" enquired her sister, a little surprised.

"Nay, it is only lately, only since I began to see with the eyes of a reasonable being,—that I discovered the utter selfishness of Lady Downham."

"Hush—hush!" cried Blanche, with a terrified glance. "Papa would never forgive you, if he thought such an expression had passed your lips."

"He cannot expect every one's eyes and ears to be sealed, like his own, by her plausibility!"—

"You are too hard upon her, Nell!" remonstrated Blanche, with a deprecating waive of the head. "*We* have nothing to complain of. She is quite as kind to *us* as to poor Lou.!"

It was well, perhaps, that the constant presence of Louisa prevented her sister from enlarging, as she might otherwise have done, upon her newly-dawning perceptions concerning the child's mother. For though the distance maintained between the little invalid and her parents prevented the effusion of filial tenderness natural to her age, and caused her to turn to her elder sisters rather than to "mamma" for the endearments due to her ailing condition, Helen felt that there would be something monstrous, in lessening the deference of a child towards its mother

It was still more fortunate that the far-off tumults of the London world did not reach her with sufficient distinctness to render balls and operas dangerously attractive. Newspapers were interdicted in the school-room, to which the mornings of the girls were still restricted; and the utmost they heard of the news of the neighborhood was from Squire Watts; who occasionally stopped their pony-chaise, to tell them they "looked as fresh as daisies, and that it was high time Miss Helen should find a younger beau to tell her so than poor old Pro."

The almost conventual seclusion in which it pleased Sir George Downham to bring up his daughters, would not, perhaps, have escaped so long the censure of the country, but that the cunning step-mother had established her reputation for kindness and excellence on so solid a foundation, on her first arrival, that she might have almost committed a massacre of the innocents with impunity.

No one knew better the value of method and regularity towards attaining a character for respectability in the eyes of a country neighborhood. She had seen the high standing of her uncle's house based upon the steadiness of a well-ordered household; and took care that the same punctuality in the discharge of family liabilities, whether of tradesmen's bills, dinner-parties, or even morning visits, should attest the conscientiousness of her character. Everything at Downham was maintained in punctilious order. No guest had ever noticed a deficiency,—no curious impertinent ever overheard a jarring word.

The only individual of the neighborhood disposed to look more closely into their conduct, was their garrulous neighbor, old Pro.

"A shame, a scandalous shame," he would sometimes say to his wife, "to see those two fine creatures converted, first into nurses and next into teachers; renouncing all the pleasures of their age and honors of their condition."

"I cannot agree with you," was her reply to her husband's outburst of indignation. "The young ladies at Downham would grow up ignorant of all the best charities and duties of the female heart, if left entirely to such lessons as Sir George and their step-mother afford. Their attendance on that infirm child is one of the happiest circumstances in their destiny."

"No reason however, why it should supersede all the natural pastimes of their age. When did you ever see Lady Downham give up her ride or drive to sit with Lou. as those girls are daily expected to do? Bless 'em! *They* never complain! *They* never seem tired of their duties! But there's a day of reckoning to come yet; and I feel as sure as that I've life, that selfish woman will be punished for neglecting her poor infirm little girl, and thinking only of her precious son-and-heir."

Had the good-natured old gentleman surmised how soon his prophesy was to be fulfilled, he would have passed over Lady Downham's peccadilloes in silence, ere he gave it utterance. For the day of reckoning was indeed at hand!—The word had gone forth.—The black flag was already waving over Downham Hall!

The heir,—the idol in purple and fine linen, on whom the winds of Heaven were scarcely suffered to blow,—and who was kept maundering at home with a private tutor, because an Eton boy has been occasionally drowned by rash boating, or a Harrow or Westminster scholar carried off by an epidemic,—sickened of the scarlet fever, and died!—Almost before the arrival of medical advice could decide that the sore throat for which Lady Downham thought fit to smother him in an over-heated atmosphere, with hermetically sealed doors and windows, was of a virulent nature, the poor child was removed from the adoration of the doating parents, who, like the ape in the fable, sealed his doom by over solicitude.

In this sad strait, Helen and Blanche, who had gone through the perilous malady at an early age, exhibited at once the sweetness and strength of their respective characters. On finding Lady Downham so overcome by the unexpected stroke as to be incapable of giving the necessary orders, they hastened to cut off all communication between the infected room

and Louisa's apartment. They even refused themselves their dearest pleasure, that of watching over their little favorite, that they might attend to their distracted parents.

It was, however, poor repayment, when, on the morrow of the funeral, they consulted the physicians in attendance on their father, (whose emotions had brought on an attack of the gout,) as to the danger that might still exist for Louisa, in spite of their precautions,—to hear Lady Downham ejaculate in a voice hoarse and hollow with weeping,—"Precautions for *her!*—when *her* death would be a mercy to us all!—And nothing was done for *him*—nothing, nothing was done to save my darling George!"

"I would forgive her," murmured the indignant Helen, when alone with her sister, "If it were the poor child she lamented. But it is only my father's heir:—it is the Sir George Downham who was to maintain her consequence in after life.—*Her* 'Ichabod! my glory is departed!' refers solely to the vain pomp and glory of the world!"

But Blanche could not at such a moment be severe. The first aspect of death had searched to the innermost her young heart; and the terrible grief of the bereaved mother was too sacred in her eyes to admit of prying into its motives. The stillness of the house, after the confusion incident on such an event had died away, seemed to paralyze her faculties; and when the time came which the physician pronounced safe for the attendants upon the lost heir (who had been consigned to the tomb with a degree of pomp almost more than decent) to be readmitted to the presence of the little invalid, she sat beside Louisa's couch like a statue, unable to utter a word.

Yet it was the presence of that silent statue which, far more than the warmer embraces and sobbing exhortations of Helen, comforted the sufferer. Enough for Lou. if her sister Blanche took her little feverish hands between her own, and fixed pitying upon her the glances of those gentle eyes which, like Cordelias, did "comfort and not burn."

"Do you think," whispered the child to her favorite sister, when tears had relieved the overcharged hearts of both, "that now mamma is left alone, she will love me better than she used? I know I am a great trouble to you all; and that a poor deformed creature like me, can never grow up to be a credit to any body. But I am sure I could love her better than my poor, poor brother ever did, who had other things to love and care for, and amusements that, at a later time, would have taken him out of her sight. But *I* shall always be at hand, to love and obey her—if she will only let me!"

And though Blanche found it difficult to answer with sincerity this touching appeal so as to satisfy the heart-broken child, her dread lest the impetuous Helen might be tempted to reply—"Always *with* her? Yes; that is the very thing of which Lady Downham is in *fear!*"—sufficed to extract from her one of *those soft persuasive answers*, which turned away the wrath of the elder sister and assuaged the worst pangs of the younger.

But Blanche's surprise at the hardness of heart exhibited by her step-mother towards the invalid, was further increased by the favor suddenly bestowed on Helen; who was now often summoned into her Ladyship's dressing-room, that they might read or work together. At any other moment, Blanche would have thought this natural; her sister being of an age to share the pursuits of a woman little more than ten years her senior, and still in the bloom of youth. But just then, the lively sallies of the gay Helen were scarcely compatible with the crape and weepers of the bereaved mother, whose tears had suddenly dried up.

There was some compensation to her indeed, for the loss of her sister's society; since the favor enjoyed by Helen was beginning to deaden her perception of the worldly-mindedness of Lady Downham.

"After all, I fear I have often wronged the poor woman!" was Helen's penitent admission to her sister, before the close of the winter and their deep mourning. "It was high-mindedness alone that prevented her conciliating us by over-indulgence, while our education was going on. Conscious of the odious imputations attached to all step-mothers, she followed the axiom of, '*fais ce que dois, arrive qui pourra;*' and waited till our attainment of years of discretion enabled us to judge fairly her character and motives."

Albeit inclined to see only the fair side of things, this explanation did not satisfy the reason of Blanche. It was not high-mindedness that produced Lady Downham's neglect of her deformed child. It was not high-mindedness which had rendered her the slave of her living son, or so soon consoled her for his loss.

"And while I was finding fault, and suffering others to find fault," added Helen, "with her keeping me shut up in the country, when the Lady Knoxes, and all the other girls of my age, were amusing themselves in town, papa and Lady Downham, (or Lady Downham and papa, perhaps, if one spoke the *exact* truth,) had always settled that we were to spend next season in London. The fourteen years' lease he had granted of his house in Curzon street fell in last month, and it is about to be painted and re-furnished for our reception. Nothing, in fact, but her conviction that we should be more comfortable in our own house than in an hotel, induced her to postpone my presentation."

"It would have spared you many discontented hours and bitter feelings, had she explained herself before," observed Blanche, less readily convinced than her sister seemed to expect.

"Had I found courage to be candid with her, she would have answered me at once."

"It was in reply then to your remonstrances, that Lady Downham told you all this!"

"I trust I have too much proper pride, my dear Blanche, to plead my own cause in a

matter of self-interest," retorted Helen. "Lady Downham simply inquired whether it was my wish to be presented by herself or Lady Mary Hartley."

"By herself!—Why she would have to be presented in the first instance!"

"Yes, by one of her aunts," interrupted Helen. "There is always a Lady Pomeroy of some kind or other to be found, it seems, when plumes and lappets are the order of the day."

"Lady Downham seems to have taken you quite into her confidence!" observed Blanche, gravely.

"She could scarcely do so when I was a girl in the school-room. But to return to the question, pray agree with me that it would look better if I were presented by my father's wife!"

"It would be more natural. And we have received so little notice from Aunt Mary!"

"Don't 'Aunt Mary' her, if you love me, Blanche!" cried her sister. "*Aunt* Mary sounds like some recipe-book-keeping, chilblain-curing old maid!—And there is really not so much love and familiarity between us, as to prevent our calling my mother's sister Lady Mary Hartley."

"*Lady* Mary, then, if you and Lady Downham have so decided it," said Blanche,—a little vexed. For till that moment, it had not occurred to her that she must lose with her sister every inch of love and confidence gained by Lady Downham.

"Still, sooner or later, the force of natural affection will prevail," mused Blanche, as she repressed the tears that were well-nigh falling. "Helen is too true-hearted not to judge fairly between us. Not a murmur of mine shall interrupt the good understanding so advantageous to my sister; unless, indeed, the wild enthusiasm of her nature should induce her to trust too largely to one who is too cold a mother to be so warm a step-mother without some doubtful motive."

Lady Downham had persuaded Sir George that it was due to the position of his eldest daughter, for her *debut* in the fashionable world to be graced with every possible advantage, and the family mansion refurnished in her honour. While Helen, little guessing that one of the chief objects of her ladyship's visit to London was to consult a lawyer notorious for the sharpness of his practice whether no legal flaw could be discovered to invalidate the fatal will that endowed the eldest daughter of Lady Emily with the rights of an eldest son, was all gratitude for the kindness of which she was the ostensible object. In her nefarious expectations, indeed, Lady Downham was fated to be disappointed. But no sooner had her professional adviser declared Sir Jeremiah's will to be unattackable in law, than she suggested to her husband the advantage of maintaining their "dear Helen" in her present happy ignorance of her rights under the deed of entail.

"An heiress," argued Lady Downham, "is *pretty sure to become the object of interested addresses. And should this* dear girl form an imprudent choice, she will be far more likely to persist in it, if aware of her prospects, than if she conceives her fortune to consist of seven or eight hundred a-year. For all our sakes, therefore, far better that the noble property awaiting her should form a surprise to the man who seeks her hand!"

Still indulging in a vague hope that Providence might bless him with another son, Sir George assented to the suggestion; adding, what the step-mother had passed over *sub silentio*, that Helen, already sufficiently consequential, might, under the certainty of being heiress to eight thousand a-year, become not only haughty but insubordinate.

One of the most painful trials of Lady Downham on arriving in Curzon street, was the contemplation of the opposite mansion, from which she had emerged to become the bride of Sir George. Fourteen years of seclusion and subjection were a dear purchase, she thought, for a jointure of a thousand a-year, and family honors about to be wrenched from her

by an unlineal hand,
No son of hers succeeding;

and the care-worn woman of two-and-thirty looked back at the sordid girl of eighteen, almost reproaching her that she had not provided better for her destinies!

At that moment, she forgot her early years of dependence, and the hectoring of purse-proud uncles and aunts. For alas! her cousin Sophia, who visited her with a face radiant with health and happiness, was on the high road to a peerage;—her lawyer-husband, the object of her youthful attachment, having progressed towards the highest honors of his profession;—while her handsome sister, Lady Rochester, as the wife of a Royal Aide-de-camp, and Field Officer of the Household Brigade, fluttered in the brightest sunshine of fashion; both having achieved with the men of their choice, an honorable position.

It was some comfort, at least, that no inquisitive uncle and aunt were still settled as her opposite neighbors, to pry into the sad secret of her nursery; Sir Felix being gathered to his fathers, and Lady Pomeroy hum-drumming away her dowager days at Brighton; while their eldest son, the present demure Sir Robert, whose attachment to Lady Downham's ill-fated sister had not prevented his early marriage with the squint-eyed Lady Harriet Hurst, was too far advanced in sainthood to do more than exchange cards with people, whose chimneys and carriage-horses smoked on Sundays.

CHAPTER VI.

"Wish me joy, mother!" cried the madcap, Lord Hartingham, taking possession of a sofa in Lady Mary's drawing-room, a week or two after the establishment of the Downhams in town. "I have got the prettiest little cousin you ever set eyes on—the prettiest little cousin in the world!"

"One of those prim lilac-complexioned daughters of the Bishop, who look like Michaelmas daisies in an early frost!"—inquired Lady Mary.—"My dear Hart! I *do* wish you joy,—not of your cousin,—but your taste!"—

"A cousin who ought to interest you far more nearly, mother, than any of the Bishop's stiff-necked generation," replied her son; "your own, *own* niece! And I promise you, that if I were not going back to my tutor's by the mail to-night, I should be at her feet to-morrow morning, and on the high road to become desperately in love."

"For the fiftieth, or the hundredth time,—*which?*" demanded Lady Mary, charmed with the flippancy she mistook for spirit. "But tell me a little more about my niece, Hart; for I conclude you have seen one of the Downhams? I was told their dry, disagreeable father was in town."

"If you knew him to be blessed with such a daughter," replied Lord Hartingham, "you ought to have warned me to get up the steam, and call upon the governor in form. As it is, I stumbled upon Miss Downham as completely *a l'improviste*, as if, instead of being her mother's sister's son, I had just landed from the Yellow Sea!—However, she was kind enough to accept me at sight."

"*Accept* you?"

"As a cousin. We embraced, and vowed eternal friendship, as in cousinship bound."

"If you would only be a little consistent for a few minutes—" pleaded his mother.

"But if you are anxious to learn news of Miss Downham, my dear mother, surely you are rather behind time in your log-book?" remonstrated Lord Hartingham. "You knew the Downhams were in town; yet have never so much as left a card at their door!"

"How do you know that?"

"From my cousin; who beset me with questions which afforded me greater insight into our family affairs, that I had ever hoped to obtain in my life."

"It strikes me, however, Hart, that no one was ever less kept in the dark by his parents than yourself. From a child, you have lived with us on the footing of a friend. If you did not choose to listen to what was said before you, the fault was yours."

"Not a bit of it! Take this from *me*, mother, since you have (the more's the pity) other little hopefuls to bring up; that a child has no business to hear or understand anything not explicitly addressed to itself."

"Yet I have sometimes heard you say you knew nothing you had been taught; and were perfectly up in ———"

"All the branches of knowledge which grow on the tree of forbidden fruit!—Granted, my dear mother,—granted! But I, you know, am an erratic genius,—a meteor, not a fixed star. I am no rule for others. You must not deal with Miles and my sisters, mother, as with me; or the tribe of Hartley would grow too obstreperous for the parish of St. James. But to return to my little dove of a cousin ——"

"To return to your cousin! Does she, in the first place, resemble her mother?"

"How on earth should I know, when she, who is a year older than myself, has not the slightest recollection of her?"

"But surely you remember my sister Emily's portrait, which hangs in my dressing-room at Glastonbury?"

"That faded thing in crayons!—Well, on the whole, I am not sure but she *does* resemble it. Both have the same kind of vague dreamy expression. Both look so sad, and yet so soothing!"

"You are growing romantic, Hart," said Lady Mary, shrugging her rotund shoulders.

"Perhaps I am. After talking an hour with Blanche, I felt just as I used last year, after listening to Beethoven's symphonies at the rehearsals of the ancient music."

"Yet how angry you always were when your grand-father insisted on your accompanying him!"

"Angry *because* he *insisted*. Had he left me to my own desires, they would probably have taken me straight to the concert; which placed me in the same state as the narcotic you used to give me for my toothache,—something between sleeping and waking,—a pain, and yet a pleasure."

"The prattle of your cousin, in short, produces the same results as an opium pill! But, all this time, you have not told me how the acquaintance came about?" demanded his mother, gazing with pride on the *blase* school-boy, whose ambition it was to look as used-up as if he had been dandled in White's window in his long coats and coral!"

"Why, since you will not accept the mystery which might impart an interest even to cousinship, know that I am indebted for it, as for a thousand other pleasures, to my dog Nep!—Nothing but Nep and his bath, mother, would get me out of bed before the small hours came round again; and this being a fine spring morning, I hurried out before you were stirring, to down with the poor animal's dust in the Serpentine."

"Where you met the Downham girls, parading with their governess!—*Connu!*"

"Don't anticipate me,—as my honored grandfather often takes the liberty of saying to my noble self. No; I met nothing but a couple of dog-stealers; who proposed to me to exchange my peerless Newfoundland for a Skye terrier and bandy-legged Blenheim, throwing a poodle pup into the bargain."

"Well, well! can't you come to the point! What can I possibly care about Neptune!"

"Without him, however, you would never reach your niece,—or I at least should not have reached her; which comes to the same thing. In the first place, I threw into the water my leaded stick, which Neptune dived for and brought back, like a trump. But unluckily, the feat attracted other idlers besides the dog-stealers; and like a manager with an overflowing house, I insisted on my crack comedian overacting his part. On flinging in my stick a second time, twice as far as usual, it stuck in the mud, or the weeds, or was carried away by an under current, so as totally to baffle poor Nep's strength or sagacity. Of course, I in-

creased his embarrassment by swearing at him from the shore, and calling him all the names that politeness and a mixed auditory would admit; till at length, frightened out of his wits, or inspired by the enterprising genius of a Columbus, away went Mr. Nep straight under the arch of the bridge, into Kensington Gardens; where, as I need not tell you, no dogs are admitted. Satisfied that he would be captured or perhaps speared, before I could reach the keeper with a bribe, away I scampered to the gate;—and reached the greensward sloping to the water, just in time to see Neptune land as triumphantly as Jason in Argos; and dry himself by sprinkling the whole contents of his coat over a poor, pale, pretty little child, lying upon shawls on the grass, attended by a sour-looking nurse, and sweet-looking sister; to whom I apologized for self and dog, more civilly than you ever heard me perform such a ceremony in my life. The little girl shivered—the tall one shuddered—and the nurse proposed to return to the carriage; when lo! in the midst of my excuses, poor Neptune was collared by the gate-keepers, and I, as indignant as if the insult had been offered to his master, began to swear I would complain to the Ranger. On which, the man demanded my name; and I informed him he would find that of Lord Hartingham on Nep's collar, as plain as the engraver could make it. 'Lord Hartingham,—my cousin Lord Hartingham,' exclaimed the tall, fair girl, who seemed inclined to take me and Nep under her protection the moment she found us attacked.

"Then followed prosy explanations, which I will spare you. A golden tip induced the keeper to tie up Neptune in his lodge; and even the little girl and nurse condescended to forget their project of returning home, in order that so melo-dramatic an incident as my encounter with my fair cousin—('that form—those features—tis *she*—it *is* my cousin!') might not pass unimproved. They were even good enough to bring me back as far as Stanhope Street Gate, in the family coach of all the Downhams, (which I hazarded at the risk of infection from the snob fever!) Neptune following, as contentedly as though he were accustomed to track any ignobler vehicle than a break or tandem!"

"And pray, after striking up this sudden treaty of alliance with Sir George Downham's daughter," observed Lady Mary, a little annoyed that so delicate a matter should have been adjusted without her intervention,—"did you quit them without making overtures for further acquaintance?"

"Acquaintance!—Acquaintance with one's cousin-german? My dear mother, the moment I found this pretty Blanche as warmly disposed to love and cherish me as I deserve, I expressed in glowing language my despair that my return to old Cramlad's Duncery this evening would prevent my ascertaining for some months to come, whether her elder sister was likely to prove as dear a cousin as herself,—forced my torquoise ring upon her finger, as eagerly as though it were not the gift of my most loving of mothers,—and took leave of her, like Hamlet's Ghost, with 'Adieu, adieu, adieu,—Remember me!'"——

"You seem to have done quite enough to secure yourself from being forgotten!" exclaimed Lady Mary, who, though accustomed to the *escapades* of her son, little expected that the apt scholar of the leading *roues* of the *beau monde*, Lord Stokesleigh and Sir Horace Lumley, would have discovered charms in any little Miss on the face of the earth. And though to part with him for so useful a purpose as the pursuance of his studies, was usually as sore a trial to her as to his grand father, on *this* occasion, she was not sorry to see him depart before further mischief was done.

It was not likely that the interview which sent back a slang-hardened coxcomb like Lord Hartingham musing to his tutor's, should produce a slighter impression on the inexperienced Blanche; whose unincidental life had brought her in contact with no specimen of the opposite sex more attractive than old Barker, or the lanky son of Pro. Watts. A striking likeness, moreover, between her new cousin and her sister Helen, caused her instinctively to adopt the strange young man, whom she might otherwise have thought *too* strange. At first sight, she felt drawn towards him by the force of kindred blood.

These sentiments, and the events from which they had arisen, she was all eagerness to unfold to her sister. But on arriving at home, she found Helen just rousing herself, after endeavoring to sleep off the weariness of her first ball. On the morrow, she was to be presented; and her vanity was just then too strong on the wing, to stoop to an interest in anything that could possibly have occurred to her sister in a morning's airing with the nurse and Lou.

All that day, it would have been as impossible to win Miss Downham's attention to anything unconnected with her train, plume, and presentation curtsey, as to interest her in some dry chapter of ancient history;—and Blanche, aware that between Louisa and her attendant, and the rest of the family, there existed no closer communication than if they inhabited the Pomeroy habitation over the way, so that there was not a chance of her introduction to Lord Hartingham being accidentally disclosed to the family, resolved to wait till the hurry of the drawing-room was past, before she introduced the subject.

When the morrow came, her own serene nature became too deeply engrossed by her sister's appearance on an occasion so interesting, to find a thought for her turquoise ring and new cousin; while Helen had wonders to relate of an intervening ball at the Dutchess of Warton's, where she had found herself an object of universal homage. While hinting that Sir Horace Lumley had scarcely quitted her side, how was she to notice that the cheek of her sister was tinged with bloom by the excitement of a new interest in life?—

"By the way, Blanche," said she, addressing her sister, who stood patiently watching the coeffeur fixing the snow-white plumes in her hair,—"*j'ai une dent centre vous!* But I will

not broach the question till after my return from the drawing-room. It would flush my roses into poppies, perhaps, were I to fight it out."

The delicate roses of Blanche were pomegranates already. But she stood too much in awe of her sister's indiscretion of speech, to provoke it in presence of a stranger.

"I am quite content," said she, as calmly as she was able, "to await your return. I should have an injury against you on my conscience, if I caused you to make your first appearance in public with a ruffled brow."

On her return from the drawing-room, Helen was again too full of herself not to have forgotten her promised explanation. Lady Downham, too, was in the highest spirits; while Sir George, who, somewhat to his own surprise, found himself deriving more consequence from his handsome daughter than he had ever done from his academic or parliamentary distinctions, was already planning dinner parties, to cement into friendship the acquaintanceships forced upon them by that strongest bond of amity of which Great Britain is cognizant,—the tie of the turbot and saddle of mutton.

While discussing with his wife the list of guests which, with due regard to worldly pomp and precedence, he had carefully made out, reference to the name of the Bishop of W—— whose formal lady and middle-aged daughters had claimed kindred with Helen at the ball of the preceding night, seemed to startle the whole family with a sudden reminiscence; and Blanche, who was busy with a lap-full of Berlin wool at the further end of the room, was peremptorily summoned by her father.

"How came it," said he somewhat sternly, 'that you never mentioned to Lady Downham or myself, that you had made acquaintance with your cousin, Lord Hartingham?"

"I have scarcely seen you since, papa," was the frank reply. But the inquiring glances fixed upon her by her stepmother, and even the equivocal smile of Helen, embarrassed her considerably, as she endeavored to proceed with her explanation. "I thought," stammered she,—"that is, I rather fancied—I intended indeed"—

"What are you muttering about?" said her father, hastily interrupting her,—"I simply asked you why you kept your acquaintance with Lady Mary Hartley's son a secret from my wife and your sister? I think I understood from you, last night, Helen, that you were as completely in the dark on the subject as myself?"

"I have not given poor Blanche a moment for the last three days, papa," replied Helen in a deprecating tone; "we were beginning to discuss the subject this morning, but I was forced to cut short the communication."

Blanche was grateful to her sister for thus turning aside her father's wrath, and as soon as they were alone, endeavored to relate the simple circumstances, but her blushes became so vivid, and her words so incoherent, that a burst of laughter was the reward of her attempt.

"Why, my dear Blanche, you seem to assign as much importance to being run against by a damp dog and his schoolboy master, as Miss Byron to being run away with by Sir Hargrave Pollexfen! When I told you this morning I had a quarrel to pick with you, it was only for not preparing me for the warm greeting of Lady Mary Hartley, who came to me at the ball last night, expecting me to be overjoyed to see her, and thanking me for my kindness to her 'dear Hart;' though whom her Hart might be, I knew no more than who is Emir at Damascus. However, the mystery is now all cleared up, and except that Lady Mary will not readily forgive you for not considering her 'dear Hart' worth discussing, I believe you are pardoned on all sides."

"And how did you like Lady Mary?" inquired Blanche with much interest.

"Exceedingly. I fancied her some insignificant person, whereas I saw her on the most intimate terms with half the fashionable people in the room. Such an aunt may prove an immense acquisition!"

"But was she *kind*,—was she *affectionate*?"

"Aunts do not fall in love at first sight—like cousins!" rejoined Helen, with an arch smile.

"Did she inquire after me?" demanded Blanche, without noticing the hint.

"Yes my dear. You had a very honorable mention. The schoolboy has described you, it seems, as a very pretty little girl."

"Lord Hartington must have been talking of Louisa!" said Blanche, coloring with displeasure at finding herself so lightly mentioned.

"No, of yourself! He said you appeared to be the kindest nurse in the world to a sick child, or something of that description. But as we are to spend the day to-morrow in St. James's Square, and be introduced in form to my grandfather, I leave to Lady Mary, my dear Blanche, the task of repeating the praises sung or said to her of you by her 'dear Hart.'"

CHAPTER VII.

The "day" of a Lady Mary Hartley being comprised between four o'clock and the hour for repairing to the opera, she would, perhaps, have named at once her dinner hour for receiving her nieces, but that the ostensible motive of their visit was to be presented to their grandfather; who, infirm, and almost imbecile, was in the habit of dining early, attended only by his valet.

Notwithstanding his indisposition and seclusion, the old Earl chose his house to be kept on the former stately footing. The consequence was, that the proud heart of Helen Downham thrilled with delight on entering the nobly-appointed mansion which she regarded as her hereditary atmosphere. The armorial badges and stately liveries which her sister passed without notice, made a forcible impression on Helen.

Not that Blanche approached without emotion the threshold over which her often-dreamed-of mother had stepped to beome a wife. But the hopes swelling in her bosom re-

garded only that holy sympathy. Some portrait might remain,—some bust,—some girlish property or possession,—that would recall the pale gentle Lady Emily, so often described by Nurse Whitfield, more closely to her knowledge and affection.

So powerfully did this expectation assail her mind, that, on entering the drawing-room, she was as pale and almost as breathless as that mother in her shroud. Had the light-hearted Lady Mary been a person of the same excitable feelings as herself, she could not but have been struck by the singular resemblance to her poor sister presented by her younger niece.

But all she saw was Helen; Helen, so like in brilliancy and beauty to her "dear Hart.!" And she welcomed them so joyfully and in so loud a key and familiar a tone, that Blanche, oppressed by the agitation of her soul, sat down without answering a word.

Lady Mary's thoughts were tuned to a different pitch from her own. Lady Mary was full of the ball of the preceding night,—the opera of that evening;—the invitations she had sent out, and invitations that were pouring in. The jingle of chains and bracelets caused by her perpetual motion, kept up a sort of running accompaniment to her random conversation, like the *grelots* to the paces of a mule.

All this delighted Helen. The easy off-hand manners of her worldly aunt, formed as great a relief to *her* as disappointment to Blanche. And when she found Lady Mary Hartley, instead of inquiring how they had been brought up and whether their step-mother were as affectionate in private as in public, inquisitive only as to whether they were good musicians, and who made their shoes and stays, she felt that in her aunt she had found a congenial spirit. And when Lady Mary informed her that she *must* not wear her hair in braids,—*must* not ride on any other than a three-pommelled saddle,—*must* not be seen dancing with Lord A——, or talking to Mrs. M——, she would as soon have thought of infringing an article of the decalogue, as any one of these gratuitous commandments of her aunt,—

So absolute she seemed
And in herself complete.

Even Helen, however, saw nothing to admire in the loud, red, jovial Colonel Hartley, who at length rolled into the room; to shake them heartily by the hand, and inquire whether they had "ever seen a faster fellow than his youngster?" It was needless for Helen to explain that as yet she had not seen Lord Hartingham; for old Tom Hartley being, as much as Lord Hartingham, the son of young Tom Hartley, had business at Tattersall's and the Yacht Club, which left him no leisure to abide a reply.—And away he hobbled to Grosvenor Place, as well as the gout would let him; inp ursuance of that never-ending still-beginning routine of fussy frivolity, which had carried him through life without one useful purpose fulfilled;—to his family an enemy,—to himself a burthen,—to his country a blank.—

During the five minutes he stayed in the room, he managed to disgust both Helen and her sister;—the latter by the coarse raillery with which he intermingled his compliments on her likeness to his cousin Emily,—"only that *she* was always a poor drooping thing, who looked as if she wanted to be tied up to a stick, like a sweet pea;"—while the former could not forgive him the *nonchalance* with which he made his appearance in his wife's drawing-room, with a still lighted cigar in his hand.

"*Nota bene*," thought the fastidious Helen, "never to marry one's first cousin!"

"The roughest diamond, but the best tempered creature in this world!" was Lady Mary's ejaculated note-explanatory, the moment he slammed the drawing-room door after him, and pursued his way, whistling, down stairs. "I know scarcely any one besides Colonel Hartley, who could have devoted his time as he has done, all the year round, to attendance on my poor father."

As the Downham girls were not of an age to know that this devotion consisted of eating and drinking the fruits of Lord Glastonbury's ten thousand a-year, shooting his game, managing his stud, and educating his own children at his lordship's expense, they readily adopted Lady Mary's opinion; and were prepared to overlook Colonel Hartley's rubicund face and boatswain's voice, in favor of his filial piety to the poor old Earl.

It was not till Lady Mary, on the carriage being announced, proposed to take them a drive in the park, that Blanche took courage to remind her that the chief object of their visit was at present unfulfilled,—that "they had not been presented to their grandfather?"

"Of course you can see him if you wish it, my dear child," replied Lady Mary, already a little surprised by the affectionate manner in which her younger niece had embraced her three pretty little girls, when brought in, full flounced and plumed, for their daily parade in St James's Park. "But I adduced that motive for your coming to see me, only to secure the consent of Sir George. I am afraid we should be not a little puzzled to make my poor father understand your relationship!"

"But if you tell him we are the children of his daughter Emily?" pleaded Blanche.

"My sister has quite passed out of his memory. At eighty, people remember only whether they have dined or breakfasted!"—she replied. "My father scarcely knows me from the housekeeper. The only person who has the talent of rousing and amusing him, is Hart. Feeble as he is, he is always excited by the sight of my son."

When at length ushered into the gloomy but handsome apartments occupied by the old Earl and Mr. Roydon, his confidential attendant, there was something so venerable—so imposing, in his snow-white hair and eyebrows, as to impart a dignity of demeanor, such as they might have found wanting to him in earlier years. The gravity of his second childhood was far more becoming than the foolish fussiness of his noon of life.

"My daughter Emily's children, do you say?" said he, mechanically repeating the matter-of-

fact announcement of Lady Mary; "what daughter Emily?"

"Who married Sir George Downham, my Lord," replied his servant, as if to spare Lady Mary the pain of explanation.

"Downham?—*What* Downham?—Smith you mean! a country banker, I think, who imposed himself on me as a country gentleman."

"Sir George Downham, of Downham Hall, papa!" interposed Lady Mary, in a coaxing voice,

"Downham Hall, eh?—Ay, ay;—a seat in Suffolk, out of which he had defrauded some deformed heiress. I recollect now. He wanted to bury your poor sister among his own vulgar relations; and I wouldn't let him; and somebody told me he called me an insolent old fool. But it didn't much signify, for I never saw him again."

"But these young ladies, papa, never offended you," pleaded Lady Mary, speaking close into the old man's ear, in hopes to spare the rising blushes of Helen, and tears of Blanche;—"and you used to be so fond of their poor dear mother!"

"I don't remember ever being fond of any daughter but you, my dear!" was his vague reply. "But where is Hart,—I don't see Hart this morning?"

"His lordship returned last week, you know, my Lord, to his tutor," again coaxed in the attendant.

"Did he? ay, so he did!—You're sure to be right, Roydon, sure to be right;—*you* always remember things. So did I once. But I wish with all my heart my grand-son were back again. My life's another thing when Hart's in the house! And you shouldn't invite young ladies here, my dear," continued he, again fondling the hand of Lady Mary, "when your son's not in the way to make the house pleasant to them."

"I hope these young ladies will come often, papa, both when Hart is here and when he is absent," replied his daughter. Then perceiving the girls were by this time fully aware of the hopelessness of making their relationship understood by the infirm old man, she took leave of him by a parting caress, and hurried them out of the room.

"I told you how it would be!" was her careless comment on what to them, to Blanche at least, was a painful scene. "As regards myself," she continued,—leading the way to her dressing-room, that they might prepare for their drive,—"I am steeled by daily habit to the sight of my poor father's infirmities. But I avoid as much as possible exposing them to the observation of other people."

Deeply grieved, both by the sight of her grand-father and the heartlessness of her aunt, Blanche pleaded a headache as an excuse for remaining at home, while Lady Mary proceeded to the Park;—an arrangement far from disagreeable to her Ladyship and Helen;—for between these two, there was affinity both of character and circumstance. They could talk together of dress and fashion—plays, balls, operas, Shakspeare, and the musical glasses.

"It is so much pleasanter to be with you than with Lady Downham!" exclaimed the *debutante*, as they made the round of the ring.

"*You* know and are known to every one.—*You* afford me a totally new view of society!"

"It would have been better for you, I fancy, and very agreeable to me, my dear Helen, had your father allowed me to bring you out," replied her aunt. "Lady Downham, with her provincial air and want of connection, will never be able to do much for you."

Poor Helen looked uneasy. Till that moment she had never heard the word "provincial;" or fancied that want of anything could be imputed to one so influential in her own little sphere as her step-mother.

"But your father has always repelled my advances," resumed Lady Mary. "Perhaps because his present wife wishes to make your *debut* a pretext for her own *entree* into the world—of which, poor soul, she knows about as much as if she had been squatting in New Zealand! That is the worst of country families. They imagine that, after living among their sheep and oxen till they have grown as *animalatre* as their flocks and herds, they can suddenly emerge from their dim *demijour* into the broad candle-light of fashionable life, and look, and talk, and feel like other people!—*Le monde*, my dear Helen, requires its apprenticeship as well as any other trade or calling!"

"And I am sure I could have had no kinder teacher than yourself," replied Miss Downham, enchanted with the lively frankness of her companion.

"But there may have been another cause for the reserve of Sir George," added Lady Mary, laughing. "Having seen *me* in my girlhood give my hand and heart to a cousin, it may have struck him that I had an aptitude for such alliances. He may have feared that I should try to marry you to Hartingham!"

"But surely," interrupted Miss Downham, "my cousin is younger than myself?"

"By nearly two years. Hart is still a mere boy. But this, as your father has lost sight of us so long, he may possibly have forgotten. However, now the acquaintance is made, Helen, we must do our best to be as much together as we can. My girls are in the nursery;—so that there is no obstacle to your going out with me whenever you can obtain leave from *les autorites*."

The interval of their absence, meanwhile, was devoted by Blanche, as soon as her tears were dried up, to a careful examination of the numerous miniatures and portraits adorning the dressing-room of Lady Mary. There was a sketch by Cosway, of two young girls, surrounded by a frame-work of roses, which she nothing doubted must represent her mother and aunt. Sisters, only, could be thus familiarly united. And how loving and mutually dependent did they look, in the picture, though so soon to be divided by the rushing torrents of social life!

"So may it be hereafter with Helen and myself!" mused Blanche, with an inward shudder. "We, who have loved each other so dearly from our cradle, and neither of whom has ever

cherished a thought unacknowledged to the other, may some day become as strangers!—My children or Helen's may arrive at Downham Hall, as we have done to-day, yearning after memorials of their mother, and striving to penetrate the mists in which her childhood appears enveloped."

The reflection was a dreary one. But what reflection that tends to penetrate beneath the surface of society, fails to produce in the youthful heart a feeling of sadness and distrust?

The first object that recalled her to impressions more agreeable, was the portrait of a fat rosy baby, in a richly-gilt frame; on which was affixed a coronet nearly as large as the head of the infant, or its lace cockade, which were of equal dimensions. Near it, hung another frame, similar in design, but containing the likeness of a boy in nankin frock. At some distance, was a larger frame, also becoronetted, exhibiting a drawing of a little fellow bestriding a shaggy dog—the dog possessing by far the more intelligent countenance of the two. While opposite to this, placed on an ornamental easel, fronting the writing-table of Lady Mary, was a small portrait in oils, of a young gentleman and his pony, which Blanche recognised at once as the effigy of her handsome cousin!

But the other three portraits—"alike, but oh! how different,"—who were they? Of Lady Mary's sons, one alone could be entitled to the attributes of nobility. These portraits, therefore, must all represent Lord Hartingham at successive epochs of his life;—the petted, idolized heir-apparent—more dear than his brothers and sisters, by the whole value of a coronet! Though there was far more difference in their several "counterfeit presentments" than between the miniature of a spruce officer in the Guards which hung near the fire-place, and the globose Colonel she had seen that morning (into which the original had expanded,) she began to trace with a degree of interest, not altogether the growth of leisure, the progress of the unmeaning baby-face into that of the mischievous urchin; and the advance of sportsmanship manifested in the proprietor of the pony, from the dog-jockey of five years old. So earnestly did poor Blanche examine the form and features of each, that the affection due to four several cousins appeared to be concentrated in the person of this fourfold *one!*

"It must be very pleasant to be loved as Hartingham is loved," mused she, after a glance at certain seals and trinkets on Lady Mary's writing-table, almost all bearing the hair or initials of her son. "It must encourage one to become all that is greatest and best, in order to be worthy of such high consideration!" was the after thought of the poor girl; who, save by her sister and old nurse, had been as long as she could remember, thoroughly disregarded; and who, for some weeks past, had begun to fear that even Helen's attachment was on the wane:—an apprehension destined to undergo a rapid strengthening after the visit to St. James's Square, which revived in Lady Mary's bosom her long-frozen sisterly affection.

Every advance therefore that could be made, and every kindness shown, was speedily lavished upon her beautiful niece; and though Lady Downham would fain have set up a jealous claim to her exclusive company, she knew herself to be insufficiently established in the London life in which it was her ambition to move, to make an enemy of the Lady Mary Hartley, who formed a constituent part of the magic circle. Fain would she have expressed her surprise that Blanche, (who though she was necessarily excluded from the balls and operas where Lady Mary was anxious to be accompanied by her elder niece, might at least have enjoyed her share in their drives in the park, or saunters in Kensington Gardens,) was never again included in her aunt's invitations. But the step-mother, satisfied on her own part to be relieved from the awkward company of a girl of seventeen, who was far more appropriately established in the school-room or sick room of her invalid sister, did not choose to raise a question that applied equally to herself.

There was another reason, perhaps, for the non-opposition which so frequently sanctioned Lady Mary Hartley's *chaperonage* of her elder niece. Helen, as a shrewd observer, was a greater obstacle to the schemes of Lady Downham. For, quiet as appeared the tenor of her life, schemes she *had!*

She was well pleased, therefore, to have her occasionally absent from those formal dinners in Curzon street, at which, in place of the Sir Roberts and Sir Richards formerly assembled at the board of Sir Felix Pomeroy, *she* contrived to congregate the capitalists of the day. Names predominant in the city, overruled in her ladyship's visiting list, even Dukes of Warton or lords of the bedchamber. For, by degrees, she was contriving to entangle Sir George in an extensive connexion of daring speculators; who, she persuaded him, sought his society for instruction-sake, as one of the clearest-headed and best-informed men of the day:—a man who had thrown up his seat in parliament from disgust at the paltry motives of modern statesmanship.

His vanity thus tickled, Sir George began to find unusual pleasure in the society of those whom he regarded as the golden castors which secure the progress of the great Juggernaut of the state. The latent leaven of Jeremiah Smithism rose in the nature which country life had converted into a clod. His eyes fastened instinctively on the City article of the Times, before he glanced at the prices of Mark Lane; and like a Baring or a Rothschild, he began to regard public events and the revolutions of empires, only as subsidiary to a fall in consols.

This was precisely the point to which the quiet little woman, who always pretended to ignore the existence of a banker's book, desired to bring the guardian of the family purse-strings. Since, at his death, the bulk of his fortune must descend to Helen, the only means of increasing the modicum of the widow and her sickly child, was either by the creepmouse system of laying by two-thirds of his income, or by successful speculation. Against the former mode, the egotism of Lady Downham, a dear lover of her ease, rebelled. But, since

at least the Smith portion of Sir George's property lay at his disposal, she saw no reason why he should refrain from those daring means of enrichment which are more or less resorted to in this commercial country, from the lords of our loftiest castles to the lowest lanes of Cheapside.

She told him that the Duke of Warton had netted thirty thousand pounds by his shares in the Devendon Canal:—that Lord Wilsdon derived three thousand a-year from the Burnham Docks:—that the whole Knox family doubled its revenue by sagacious investments: that if they, dunce-headed and dolts, could accomplish such an augmentation of income, what might not *he* achieve, who was known to possess one of the most calculating heads in the country!

"The merchant-princes of Venice, Genoa, and Antwerp," she said, "amassed their almost fabulous wealth without forfeiture of caste.—Why should not Sir George Downham become the founder of a fortune which, like that of the Barings, might eventually lead to a peerage?"

Thus encouraged, the country baronet was not slow in finding a stimulus for his life of leisure. Money-making appeared to him the end and aim of human existence!—the talents of which he had always felt conscious, had now accomplished their purpose. He had applied them to classical attainments,—to politics,—to agriculture; but they had proved either above or below the object.—They had found their level at last!

All that annoyed him in the discovery was, that he should have allowed his faculties and capital to lie so long dormant: it was unworthy of himself and of the father before him, whose industry had converted copper into the gold into which his own shrewdness was about to convert signatures and slips of paper.

Proud of the plausibility of his position, he of course fancied that he was imposing upon the submissive wife of whom he was the puppet; by hinting to her that the grand object of his daily visits to the city, was to create for her and her child the prosperity he was unable otherwise to secure.

Acting in the spirit of the money-making tribe in which he had secretly affiliated himself, Sir George judged it prudent to invest the first fruits of his success in those outward and visible emblems of affluence which announce the wealthy capitalist. He launched two new carriages, and engaged an opera-box for the remainder of the season; while costly additions to his service of plate, bearing the double crest of the Downhams and Sm—ths, were exhibited by the leading silversmiths of the West end.

"Immensely rich!" was an epithet now frequently applied to his name, in reply to inquirers who had hitherto rated him as a Suffolk baronet with a rent-roll of eight thousand a-year.

"Both his first wife, and his second, had handsome fortunes," added some other newsmonger, of the class of those who at a London dinner-party will say anything, sooner than have nothing to say.

"His three daughters, in short, will divide among them something like twelve or fifteen thousand a-year!" added another idler, of an inquiring turn of mind. And from a vague assertion in the affirmative, arose a report far more conducive to the multiplication of partners who contended in every ball-room for the hand of the beautiful Miss Downham, than her vanity could have borne to surmise.

Still, there is always among the young, a certain cloud upon courtships commenced under the auspices of the golden calf! Though Helen Downham, with her elastic step and beaming looks, was fully qualified to be fallen in love with, from the moment it came to be circulated in the Clubs, that she was "a catch," young men of delicate feeling stood aloof, lest they should be classed among the fortune-hunters; leaving the field clear to those whose looks were as hard as their hearts, and whose attentions were of the automaton kind, which even an inexperienced girl detects as mechanical. It was easy to perceive that their knee-worship exhibited no spark of real devotion.—Not thus had the spirited Helen dreamed of the soft passion which was to be as pure and all-engrossing as that with which she hoped to reward the entire devotion of the man of her choice. The eye that sought her own when weary of the postures of an opera-dancer,—the compliments offered to her when worn threadbare by long usage among the married coquettes of the day, were offensive to her taste. There was no bloom upon such fruit; and she would as soon have thought of buying a dusty bunch of half-faded roses from the hawkers of Regent street, as encourage the flighty attentions, which though what Bacon would have called their "sordid and indign origin," was undreamed of, were as odious in effect as in their cause.

Meanwhile the gay season was wearing away. Helen was wasting her smiles upon a score or two of ball-rooms, as an established beauty. Lady Mary Hartley was perpetually congratulated on the *success* of her niece, who enjoyed all the *eclat* of a popular actress. Those who did not know her by sight, were apt to exclaim, when interrogated as to whom they considered the belle of the season, "Miss Downham, of course!"

It was probably that very "of course" which predisposed Lord Hartingham, when released in July from the penalty of Greek and Latin, mathematics and roast mutton, to reply to his mother's cross-questionings concerning Helen's attractions—that she was "a showy girl, but not to be compared with her younger sister." And lest he should be suspected of succumbing to public opinion instead of having a judgment of his own, his bearing towards the fair Helen was so different from that of the least devoted of the host of her admirers, that even a girl less self-satisfied might have been excused for snubbing him, as a presuming ill-conditioned boy.

If Miss Downham troubled herself at all concerning her cousin sufficiently to know the number of times per week, and number of hours per day, which the idle boy, eschewing

his former delight in billiard-rooms and tennis-courts, devoted to accompanying Sir George's two younger daughters in their country drives, or those mornings spent in Kensington Gardens deemed essential by the faculty to the health of poor little Lou,—she probably thought his civilities to Blanche intended only as a mortifying retaliation upon herself; and forbore, in St. James's Square, from all allusion to the subject.

"Don't talk to me about him!" said she to her sister, who made no secret of their frequent meetings. "If *you* can support the company of such a mere monkey, I have not patience to hear his name. Since Lord Hartingham has reversed the order of things, and prefers the nursery and curds-and-whey at eighteen, because, at ten, his father initiated him into the pleasures of brandy-and-water and cigars, it would be as well perhaps if he paraded himself with his own little sisters instead of mine. However, his mother is too kind to me to admit of my interfering with the silliness of her son."

Lady Downham had replied in a strain nearly similar to similar communications on the part of the puzzled Blanche; Sir George sitting by with lack lustre eye, engrossed by a calculation of the depreciation of shares in the Caledonian Canal, and scarcely knowing whether he possessed a nephew or a daughter. So that the young girl, who at first had feared to give encouragement to Lord Hartingham's attendance lest it should draw upon her the animadversions of her family, found to her joy, that the severe code of decorum applicable to ball-going young ladies, did not apply to those still unpresented; and that she was at full liberty to accept the beautiful flowers brought her by her cousin, and welcome his daily arrival as eagerly as Louisa herself.

"It is such a pity that you two cannot always be together," said Lou., one day, when Lord Hartingham was forced to leave them earlier than usual, to meet his father by appointment at Lord's cricket-ground; "for you always find something pleasant to say to each other, and are always so sorry to say good bye! And then poor Blanche has nobody else to converse with. Helen comes home from her balls and parties so tired, that she can talk of nothing but herself; and instead of being sorry to leave us, is never happy but when she is out of the house. So that my dear Blanche has nothing left but me; who am so often ill, and cross, and stupid, and whom nobody would be at the trouble of loving, and teaching, and amusing, but such a dear good sister."

Louisa was rewarded for discoursing so like an oracle, by a silent kiss from her sister, and a hurried muttering from Lord Hartingham, which sounded very like a hope that "the time might come, when her kind wishes would be fulfilled; and that, should such a piece of good fortune await him, Louisa must often, *very* often be their guest." On hearing which, the agitated Blanche, who, though still endued with the simplicity of girlhood, sufficiently understood the value of words to know that her cousin's declaration amounted to something very like a proposal of marriage, was heartily glad when the nurse seized the occasion of the dead silence that followed, to propose that, before my Lord left them, he should see them safe to the carriage.

It was perhaps the moisture on the cheek of his cousin, descried by Lord Hartingham as he took leave, or a suspicion that his pressure of her hand while assisting her into the barouche was not wholly unreturned, which determined him the first time he found himself alone with his mother, to announce his matrimonial intentions. That Lady Mary could bring herself to oppose *any* wish or project of his, of whatever nature, did not appear among the possibilities of things; but in the present instance, he expected his wishes to be met more than half way. She had pointedly said to him, when demanding his homage for her favorite Helen, "*Could* he be too attentive to the woman nearest to him in blood after his mother and sisters?"—

And yet, when his secret was out, had he announced his attachment to an actress, her Ladyship could not have been more disconcerted, or more indignant. He had selected, as people usually do on such occasions, an awkward moment for the disclosure; while Lady Mary sat awaiting in her dressing-room the lighting of her toilet candles, to dress for a royal ball; her husband being absorbed in his usual occupation at that hour, of snoring away the fumes of his daily bottle of claret. At first, indeed, she attributed the flushed cheek and excited manner of her dear Hart, to his having imbibed somewhat more than his usual stint of his father's potations. But when he re-commenced, for the third time, his protestations, that the day he attained his majority, he would demand the hand of his cousin Blanche, she began to fancy that, for once, her dear Hart might be in earnest; and overcome her natural indolence sufficiently to rise from the sofa and close the door of the adjoining room, (where her waiting-woman was impatiently rustling her Ladyship's gros de Naples, as a signal that it was time for her to dress, in order that the housekeeper's room might not be defrauded of its rubber;) lest, peradventure, news of the youthful Baron's intentions should get wind in the house.

Personally to attack the object of his choice, was impossible. Blanche Downham was too young, too fair, too pure, too well-born, too well-endowed, to admit of the slightest aspersion. But without compromising her own candour, the startled Lady Mary had good grounds for opposition.

"Are you mad, Hart," said she, "to be thinking of marriage when the Horse Guards has just decided you to be too young for a commission? Wait for Heaven's sake for a beard, before you pretend to a wife!"

"I have heard my father say that from the time he went to Eton, he had made up his mind to have no wife but his cousin Mary," rejoined Lord Hartingham, in what he intended to be a mollifying spirit.

"Because his cousin Mary possessed the means of maintaining them both," rejoined his

mother. "*He* had no need to seek the consent of his parents. He had even the grace not to ask that of my father, till I had spent a season in the world and enjoyed my chance of a more eligible match."

"He was right—because the whole fortune was on your side. But without much vanity, mother, I have a right to consider myself a match for Blanche. Sir George Downham has no pretext to object; and I flatter myself that my father and you will have no inclination."

"Then I can promise you you are completely mistaken!" cried Lady Mary, with a heightened color. "As a general rule, I object to marriages, between cousins. *One* in a family is more than enough!"

"Not very flattering to my father."

"I beg your pardon, Hart! Your father is thoroughly of my opinion. Our family connection wants extending. To marry your cousin would be as bad a thing for your children, as *our* match for your brother and sisters."

"This is an account, mother, which must be settled *with* my children, and not with my parents," was Lord Hartingham's undutiful reply. "I have satisfied my conscience by acquainting you with my intentions. Let us hope that my father will receive *his* share of my communications more kindly."

"Why, you don't mean to say, Hart, that at your age, you are seriously going to ask your father's consent to your marriage with Blanche Downham!"

"To my *engagement!*"

"Then let me entreat that you will do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Lady Mary, greatly excited. "Your poor father has cares enough on his hands already. His affairs are grievously embarrassed; and if your grandfather were to die, I know not what would become of him!"

"My grand-father is scarcely likely to leave his only surviving daughter unprovided for," said her son, drily.

"The Glastonbury estates are entailed. He cannot have laid by *much* out of his income; and my share of my mother's fortune, has, I fear, nearly melted away to repair the consequences of your father's ill-fortune."—

"Say, to satisfy his play-debts," coolly interrupted Lord Hartingham.

"All that will remain for us, therefore, when my uncle, the Bishop, succeeds to the Glastonbury title and estates," continued Lady Mary, "will be the income of the Hartingham property, to which you will succeed at my death."

"There you are mistaken, mother," rejoined her son. "My grand-father told me hundreds of times, before he fell into his present childishness, that on his death, the Hartingham property became mine. God forbid that I should profit by my rights, or claim it, if your affairs be in the deplorable condition you describe. But I think it strange,—I think it *even* hard,—that if such be the case, you should have kept me so utterly in the dark; and that the profuse extravagance of this house should have been kept up, throughout my grand-father's illness, though many years have elapsed since *he tasted more* than his boiled chicken and barley-water. You and my father have taken no more thought of those who were to come after you, than Louis XV, who used to exclaim '*apres nous, le deluge!*'"

Lady Mary sat rebuked. She had even a hard matter to suppress a whimper. But in their domestic altercations, her dear Tom had never encouraged the use or abuse of the pocket-handkerchief.

"You must be aware, mother," resumed her son, "that what you have so lightly disclosed, makes a life-and-death change in my fortunes. Till now, I always fancied myself at liberty to enjoy myself, and love, and marry, at my own good pleasure. I never thought I was to sacrifice the best blessings of life to those who for *me* have sacrificed nothing!"

His mother's tears now fell unchecked. "But since it appears," he continued, "that I have to make my own way through life, let me hasten to prepare myself for a task so little contemplated. I will not resume my unprofitable studies. Latin and Greek would be of small use to a soldier of fortune. I will go abroad. I will make myself master of modern languages, and above all, learn to rough it through the world."

More abundantly than ever did Lady Mary's tears burst forth at the idea of her dear Hart,—her best-beloved child,—driven forth to exile, to serve his bitter apprenticeship to poverty;—with nothing to call his own, but a portmanteau, a dressing-box, and a *valet de chambre!*

"Your influence must determine my father to consent to all this," resumed Lord Hartingham, more angry than touched by her tears. "I have been made a fool of long enough. If next week you prevent my starting for the continent, I swear to you, mother, (and you know whether I keep my word,) that I will engage myself in the most solemn manner to my cousin Blanche; and, till my majority enables me to claim her hand, work for my living as a sailor, soldier, plough-boy, stone-mason,—no matter what:—that the world may see I am no burthen to you and my father!"

CHAPTER VIII.

At the close of the season, when the red sun of August shone as usual in May Fair upon sportsmen, pointers, and other puppies, starting with their French cooks and valets, their canisters of powder and cigars, for the campaign of the Moors; and family coaches with lank post-horses for sweet, sweet Home, or far sweeter Dover, on their way to the German baths; Sir George Downham split the difference of the latter dilemma, by leaving his two younger daughters at Sandgate for sea-bathing, while Helen accompanied Lady Downham and himself to the continent.

It was almost without regret, that poor Blanche saw them depart. She was fond of the sea,—the sole restoration that secured a moment's health to the little companion whose fond dependence upon herself rendered her daily more dear; and she felt that if anything

could subdue the heartache which, exert herself as she might, *would* make itself felt, it must be the soothing aspect of that mighty element, in presence of which, man and his works are forgotten!

For the few words which had passed between her and her cousin at a parting witnessed by Lady Downham and Helen, sufficed to convince her that worldly motives alone had driven him into exile. Lord Hartingham had said, aloud, "I am going abroad because I find I shall never be rich enough to live in England as I wish to live; and it is easier to learn one's lesson of shabbiness any where than at home." But he had added in an under tone, heard only by Blanche, "I am going because it is essential for me to leave you, and better for us both!"

Scarcely, indeed, had he quitted the room, when Helen exclaimed with a gesture of supreme contempt, "I thought that silly boy had exhausted the chapter of absurdities! But the air of sentiment he is now taking up, is, if possible, more ridiculous than his previous fopperies. I suppose he thinks it *infra dig* to acknowledge that his father and mother, indignant at his idleness and extravagance, have sent him to finish his education at some foreign university."

But Blanche, though she wisely abstained from taking up his defence, felt convinced that his departure was his own act and deed. And from the air of deep feeling impressed on his usually joyous face, was satisfied that he not only quitted her in sorrow, but from motives more worthy than usually influenced his conduct. After witnessing the embarkation of the pleasure-party for their foreign tour, she condemned herself severely for having allowed anything like estrangement to spring up between her and that beloved Helen, "sole sister of one mother." The first night she laid her head upon her pillow with the knowledge that the rolling sea was between them, tears mingled with her self-accusations. "She ought to have been more frank—she ought to have avowed to Helen every word that had passed between her and her cousin. Helen's experience might have served to guide her conduct. Helen's kindness would have sufficed to assuage her regrets."

But on the morrow, when daylight and reason broke in upon her mind, she could not but admit that the coolness had been entirely of her sister's creation; that Helen had done her utmost to keep her out of sight and reach of the civilities of St. James's Square. Above all, that Helen's animosity towards Lord Hartingham seemed to carry with it a feeling of pique and resentment. Unwilling to impute to her sister a reprehensible sentiment, she chose to fancy that Lady Downham had rendered Lord Hartingham's preference of his younger cousin a matter of jealousy to the elder; who, nevertheless, among her host of conquests, could well afford to spare the "saucy school-boy" she affected to despise.

These second thoughts, though far from palatable, prevented Blanche from opening her heart by letter to the sister in whom she longed to repose her confidence. Her communication would, perhaps, be shown to her step-mother, perhaps to her still more awful father: by whom all might at length be submitted to Colonel and Lady Mary Hartley. And what right had she to inflict such an injury upon her cousin? No! she must not write to Helen! She must keep her own secret, even though, like the fox under the Spartan's cloak, its fangs fastened upon her heart.

And thus, poor Blanche was left to the dangerous pleasures of reverie, "by the sad sea-waves," and those first fond impulses of woman's tenderness, which, when compressed, become volcanic fires; but wisely tempered and distributed, serve to warm, cheer, and enlighten the dreariness of this selfish world.

The travellers, meanwhile, were less spiritual in their imaginings. Nothing ideal influenced the projects of even the youngest and least worldly of the party: while, as to Sir George, instead of bewildering his faculties, as he might have done twenty years before, by galleries of art, or historical sites, or picturesque points of view, his curiosity was solely excited by zinc, copper or coal-mines, belonging to companies whose shares were in the market; or manufactories whose patents might be extended to Great Britain. At Ghent, he took note of certain improvements of machinery, as applicable to the production of cotton-twist; at Liege, of a new process for the tempering of sword-blades; at Coblentz, of an economical alloy for silver; while his lady, pretending to admire the extent of his scientific knowledge and his shrewd insight into commercial facilities, stood by with the eye of a hawk, and tongue of a special pleader; foreseeing only, amid the whirr of wheels and smother of factories, a satisfactory codicil to the last will and testament of Sir George Downham, Bart., of Downham Hall.

Instead of simply presenting his letters of credit to the Frankfort banker, accustomed to discuss the business of migratory English baronents by a sack full of thalers and an obsequious scrape, he found it pleasant to lounge away hours in a compting house, savoring powerfully of *sauerkraut* and synagogue; in hopes of initiating himself into those mysteries of pelfmongery, which are supposed to be proficiently understood in the city once renowned for the crowning of emperors, as now, for the be-coronetting of Jews.

His courier took care that Sir George's arrival should make a sensation; and he was mylorded by long-haired German waiters, and stared at by long-eared cockney tourists; who, though they had never before heard the name of "Lord Downham," had sufficient faith in the liberality of Government as regards the multiplication of peerages, to believe in the nobility of a man who travelled with carriages and *fourgons*, men-servants and maid-servants; and whose impudent *Chasseur* swore even a Prussian dragoon out of countenance.

To Sir George and his lady, solely intent upon the main chance, these noisy honors appeared both frivolus and vexatious. But Helen, new to the tinsel and fopperies of life, was so

no means so philosophical. She was childishly delighted to find herself converted into a personage. Not that her lovely young face required any such enhancement to attract admiration, in a country where beauty is a poet's dream, requiring the aid of a very powerful imagination; but because a certain handsome showy Lord Efferville, the nephew of the Duke of Warton, (a Viscount by the grace of the sign manual, not of a courier's braggings,) who, though ranked among her admirers, had not unfrequently deserted her side in the London ball-rooms, to figure as the partner of Lady Laura Knox or some other damsel of fashion, had occasion at Emms and Kissingen to perceive Lord and Lady Downham surrounded by Highnesses, royal and serene, and Russian princes sufficient to have peopled Mivart's Hotel; with whose homage the lovely Helen trifled as prettily as a kitten with a ball.

It is true that, though Lord Efferville had subjected her to the alternate clouds and sunshine with which handsome young Viscounts are apt to chequer the existence of pretty girls, who allow their preference to be too easily bespoken, she firmly believed his tour to the German baths to have originated in his desire to meet her on neutral ground; where her charms and merits would have fair play, uncrushed by the sneers of Duchesses or rivality of their daughters.

Lady Mary Hartley, indeed, who during the early days of the flirtation, warmly congratulated her niece on her prospect of becoming Lady Efferville, had ended by shrugging her shoulders on the subject, and curling her lip; assuring Helen that her favorite partner was said to be an engaged man, and that his attentions went for nothing. But even *this* warning did not suffice: her step-mother's frequent insinuations that the Hartleys would not be sorry to bespeak her for one of their sons, having placed her on her guard where perfect confidence should have prevailed.

By Lady Downham, on the other hand, her partiality for Lord Efferville was silently but perseveringly encouraged. As the wife of a young man of his fortune, the heiress-ship of her step-daughter appeared less alarming than if married to one of the grasping spendthrifts by whom the Downham woods would be regarded as an asparagus bed—good only to be cut; and no aid was wanting to forward the increase of intimacy between them which could be afforded by pic-nics and *parties de campagne.* As an excuse for engaging Lord Efferville to be constantly in their society, the Downhams even overcame the instinctive unsociability of English nature; and made acquaintance to the right and left in a generous spirit of daring, that overlooked a thousand deficiencies of pedigree and moral perfection. To ensure meeting Lord Efferville at dinner, and have an excuse for inviting him with a party of his country people, they accepted a whole wilderness of Sir Thompson Brownes and Lady Ruddell Moggs; to say nothing of several flighty Lady Sophias and madcap Lady Madalenas, with whom he was on familiar terms, and whose *mauvaise odeur* they overlooked for his sake.

It is true, Lord Efferville took occasion to hint to Sir George, that of great British society, he had more than enough in Great Britain. But it was only the fair companion of his rides beside the Serpentine and waltzing at Almacks, who lent an ear to his whispered assurances that in *her* company even Ruddell Moggs and Thompson Brownes were supportable. And Lady Downham still continued to augment her English horde; in order that her own and her husband's attention being ostensibly engrossed by the duties of hosthood, there might be an opportunity for Helen to carry on her flirtation unobserved.

The consequence was, that tidings of it very shortly reached England; thanks to the voluminous correspondence of the Misses Ruddell Mogg and Thompson Browne, who were not sorry to grace their daily despatches to Herts, Beds, and Hunts, with the report of a probable marriage between "their charming friend Miss Any Body, with a lord of any description;" how much more, a fashionable Viscount, the very sight of whose cabriolet before White's, had often sufficed to put their spirits into a flutter! And lo! the story became an item of random gossip.

The letters of Helen to her sister became constrained and rare. It is only a vulgar mind that seeks a confidant for a first attachment; and not wishing to allude to the feelings that began to occupy her whole existence, Helen Downham found it easier to write no letter at all, than to write one in which the name of Efferville was to find no mention.

Perhaps, if the truth were told, she looked forward with delight to the surprise which Blanche would experience on receiving from her sister an abrupt announcement that she was about to have a brother-in-law, as noble and good-looking as the foolish boy of whom she thought so highly—in all other respects his superior, a million-fold!

But the surprise of Blanche had even preceded her anticipations. The Sandgate Barker, whose visits to poor little Lou. were now a matter of daily necessity, and who considered it as much a part of his professional duty to dispense little boluses of tittle-tattle as to despatch round the town his starving errand-boy with an oilskin-covered basket full of pill-boxes and pink draughts,—saw fit to draw from his pocket one morning, after the cheering assurance that his patient was "a shade better," a copy of the "Morning Post," which contained, under the head of FASHIONABLE INTELLIGENCE, the following astounding paragraph:

"We learn that the lovely and accomplished daughter of Sir George Downham, Bart., of Downham Hall, in the county of Suffolk, is about to be led to the hymeneal altar, by Viscount Efferville, of Efferville Abbey. The youthful couple, who have been passing the season at the German baths, will be united at the British Legation at Frankfort, early in the ensuing month, and immediately proceed to spend the winter in Italy."

After the recital of these lines, the smirking Galen proceeded to administer a lavish dose of congratulations on the auspicious event. But

before he reached the first full stop of a got-up speech containing the words joy and felicity, by way of theme, with a series of difficult variations, he found that a dose of sal volatile would be much more to the purpose. Pale as death, and trembling in every limb, poor Blanche was thoroughly overcome by so grievous a proof of estrangement on the part of her sister. About to be married—having already bestowed her whole heart and soul upon a stranger—and not so much as a word on the subject to one who loved her as herself! How bitter a retaliation for her own uncommunicativeness on the subject of their cousin Hart!

Yet in the letter written and despatched to the future Lady Efferville the moment her officious informant had left the house, not a single complaining word! The nature of Blanche was so little susceptible of resentment, that the blow she had received, like a cut given to a sugar-maple, brought forth only a gush of sweetness.

All she could do for the relief of her wounded feeling, was to kneel down, when her letter was gone, beside the couch of poor Louisa; and fold her little wasted hand more fondly than ever between her own.

"You are all that will be left to me soon," said she, turning away her head, lest the sight of her tears should discourage the invalid. "You must love me the better, Lou. We two, at least, shall never part."

"Yes, we shall," rejoined the child;—"we shall part, because I am going fast where you are not yet called to follow. And I like that better, Blanche, than to live on, and see you marry a stranger, and go to a new home, while I had to remain with —— with those who care for me so little."

Fain would Blanche have interrupted her. But she had not spirits for more than a silent pressure of her hand.

"I once thought indeed," said the child, in a low but steady voice, that we had both happier prospects. Lord Hartingham almost promised me, Blanche, that I should live with you both, after you were married. But I saw by his face when he wished us good bye, that all hope of *that* was over; and I never talk to you about it, my dear sister, or about *him*. But I think very much about him, Blanche, and am grieved for you both;—not for myself—because I am going to a still quieter and happier home."

Repressing her own tribulations, Blanche addressed herself to the task of wearing a more cheerful face, that she might not sanction the gloomy forebodings of one whose comforts were so scarce.

Eagerly were the days counted by both, while awaiting the reply to Blanche's letter; more particularly as not a line from the travellers reached them during the interval. But alas! when the time expired which should have brought an answer, the postman still passed their door!

"She has forgotten me!" was the mild ejaculation of poor Blanche, when ten days elapsed without the smallest communication.

They had now reached the period originally fixed by Sir George for his return to England; and it was only because the newspapers declared her sister's wedding about to be solemnized at Frankfort, that Blanche conceived no hope of their early arrival. The October winds had begun to bluster loud enough to render her sojourn at the seaside a doubtful advantage to Louisa, whose blue cheeks and shrinking frame could scarcely confront the boisterous breezes; but still, the Downhams were away.

"At all events," mused Blanche, when seeking motives of consolation to relieve her sense of desertion, "so long a stay abroad, and the publicity attending such a marriage, will probably bring them into communication with my cousin. If still at Heidelberg,—qualifying himself by the study of German, for his diplomatic career,—he cannot fail to be invited to Helen's wedding. On my father's return, I shall, therefore, obtain tidings of his welfare."

He was doubtless improving himself, doubtless endeavoring to render himself worthy, if not of her, of his lofty destinies. And at that thought, the torquoise ring was pressed, for the thousandth time, to her lips!

CHAPTER IX.

Two months had elapsed since the period originally assigned for the return of the family to England; and the long December evenings, after Louisa had removed her little head from her sister's knee or shoulder, to place it on her pillow, appeared *almost* too long to the solitary Blanche; when a letter from "my lady" reached the housekeeper who presided over their establishment at Sandgate, desiring that "all might be settled and in readiness on the morrow, for the removal of the young ladies to Downham Hall."

Not a word more. Not a syllable in explanation of the causes of their delay, or the smallest reference to marrying or giving in marriage. Her ladyship's missive was a mere letter of business. But, it was dated from Paris, a fact which comprised a host of explanations. Poor Blanche's letters had doubtless never reached her sister. The family had quitted Kissingen sooner than she expected; and her congratulations were still in the hands of the Frankfort banker. It remained to be proved whether Helen were already in the arms of the Viscount.

Very anxious, accordingly, became her heart as the moment of their departure drew near; for, from a passage in Lady Downham's communication, she felt convinced that the family had already arrived in England and were to join them on the road: an idea which rendered more than tolerable their long and dreary journey, at so unpropitious a season of the year. For Christmas was at hand; and even wrapt in a double allowance of furs, it was hazardous for the fragile little invalid to confront the air.

But this ought to have convinced the thoughtless Blanche that she had no imme-

diate hope of reunion with her sister. For the delicacy of the sick child compelling her to easy stages, Sir George and Lady Downham had too much consideration for their own comfort, to expose themselves to four frosty days on the road when two would suffice for the journey.

It was accordingly not till she reached the threshold of Downham Hall that Blanche found herself once more enclasping, not enclasped by, the graceless truant; and but that her tears were already flowing too freely to admit of much clearness of observation, she must have perceived at once, that the ever striking and graceful deportment of Helen exhibited a shade of gloomy hauteur.

That Helen was not already a wife, was clear from the name by which she was addressed by the servants. But was it a thing to be? Was it a thing which had ever been in question?

In a slighting careless tone, both Helen and Lady Downham apologized for the length of time which had elapsed since they last wrote. The hurry of travel, the uncertainty of their movements, the probability that their letters might be lost on the road, were glanced at with an air of gay *insouciance;* as though it must be as much a matter of indifference to Blanche to learn whether her only sister were married, or "doing thereanent," as it appeared to be to Lady Downham to know whether her only child were dying or dead. Soon afterwards, on noticing the pallor which fatigue and emotion had produced on the cheeks of his daughter, Sir George dismissed her to rest.

"Helen and she must have much to say to each other. But he requested it might be dedeferred till the morrow."

But on the morrow, poor Blanche began to fear that the reserve of her father and Lady Downham must have proved contagious; for Helen had grown as close as either of them. To little indeed did the "much" amount which she thought proper to communicate. Nay, a certain hardness of tone and dignity of manner, which she probably assumed to distance the inquiries of her sister, served to refrigerate in turn the frankness and cordiality instinctive in that sister's heart.

"I will wait till her feelings warm towards me," was the forbearing reflection of the mortified girl. "To effect this change in her, some evil must have occurred; and in that case, she will soon feel in want of a friend to whom to confide her troubles."

Far more difficult to deal with was the simple-hearted child to whose room both sisters repaired together after breakfast.

Louisa was not of an age to be imposed upon by Parisian airs; or to fancy that because her beautiful eldest sister was attired in the last new fashion, and braided her hair in a form which the rusticity of Suffolk hailed as marvellous, she was no longer to be accosted as though the same blood ran not in their veins. *She,* therefore, interrogated her without scruple.

"It was such a pleasant, pleasant surprise, dear Nell," said the child, "when we discovered that we were to find you at home again with papa and mamma. A foolish newspaper was shown to us at Sandgate which announced that you were going to be married,—going to Italy,—going away from us all!"

"When you are older, Lou," rejoined her sister, unable to repress the eloquent rush of blood to cheeks which had perhaps lost some portion of their bloom amid the vigils of fashionable life, "you will know that reports of such a kind are certified as false by appearing in the newspapers at all. There was not a word of truth in the story."

"But surely this Lord whom they talked about *was* with you on the Rhine?" persisted Louisa, as if to vindicate her own veracity. "I remember one of your first letters to Blanche mentioning him as of your party from Emms to Schwalbach."

"A party which consisted of thirty or forty people! If it followed that I were going to be married to any member of it only because he was single, I might be about to become a grand duchess, Lou., or even an hereditary princess."

"No, because *that* would be impossible," pleaded the mild good sense of the little girl. "But the other marriage was not only possible, but appeared *so* probable—"

"That you concluded it was about to take place, but I had never given the slightest hint on the subject to those nearest and dearest to me! No! Lou.; when about to be married, both you and Blanche shall receive due forewarning, that, like Lady Marlbrook in the song, you may bring your white pocket handkerchiefs duly into play!"

Blanche listened in silence. By way of reply to this tirade, she contented herself with kissing her sister's hand. Something in the febrile vivacity of Helen's manner convinced her that pique and vexation were gnawing her heart. A moment afterwards, her misgivings were confirmed.

"As to Lord Efferville," she resumed, after a pause which seemed to have restored her presence of mind, "he is one of the pleasantest fellow-travellers in the world; and as he speaks excellent German, we found him exceedingly useful on the Rhine. But my father and Lady Downham would not have had him so constantly in our society, had they not been aware that he was an engaged man,—betrothed, these two years past, to his cousin Lady Laura Knox, and only awaiting the completion of her seventeenth year, to solemnize the marriage."

"Then what could make those shameful newspaper-makers tell such untruths!" exclaimed Louisa aghast. "Is there no way of punishing people for making so much mischief to no purpose?"

"No mischief is ever intended by such reports; and in this case, none was done, that I am aware of," replied Helen firmly. "On the contrary, the paragraph which seems to have excited so much amazement at Sandgate, proved the means of accelerating Lord Efferville's marriage. For when the Duke of Warton discovered that his nephew's engagements

were so little understood by the public, as to give rise to such false conclusions, he consented to give him his daughter at once; and they are already preparing all sorts of gay doings at Warton Castle for the wedding."

The fluctuating color with which, in spite of all her efforts, poor Helen uttered this announcement, convinced her sister that the root of the evil was now laid bare. Her father and Lady Downham had *not* been aware of the pre-existing engagements of the young Viscount, till the Warton family, warned by newspaper report of the probability that their rich prize might be wrested from them, recalled him hastily to England for their fulfilment.

All she wished, was, that by these errors, the feelings of her sister might not have become too deeply implicated. That she was indifferent on the subject, could not be hoped. The assumed levity of her tone betrayed the bitterness working within. But Blanche hoped she might be rather angry than hurt;—that it was the sense of ill-usage she resented,—not the object of her attachment she bewailed. Young as she was, of the magnitude of the latter grief, poor Blanche had a tolerably accurate conception! And tears rose into her eyes as she reflected that the same dull, dreary, heart-wearying moments *she* had been spending at Sandgate, might be in store for Helen in Downham Hall.

Something in the piteousness of her looks as she glanced at her sister, seemed to awaken a sudden reminiscence in Miss Downham's mind.—"By the way, Blanche, I have all sorts of messages to you from Hartingham, whom we met romancing about the country, in the Neckarthal. To *you*, Lou., he has even sent a *cadeau;*—a seal, made of some hideous pebble or other, which he fished, I believe, out of the Rhine. I will give it you as soon as my dressing-box is unpacked."

"How kind to remember me,—how very very kind!" exclaimed the child, her little languid eyes beaming with sudden animation. "But he was always the best and dearest cousin in the world!"

"Lucky for Hartingham if he find many people as well inclined as yourself to take his virtues upon trust!"—rejoined Miss Downham, shrugging her shoulders.—"This best and dearest cousin, Lou., is a schoolboy, whom you knew for six weeks; and who is generally admitted to be as presuming, as he is silly and worthless."

"Did you hear anything abroad, then, to his disadvantage," inquired Louisa, raising herself eagerly from her recumbent position.

"*He* would have considered all we heard particularly creditable!" replied Helen, with a scornful smile. "It has been long *his* ambition to be thought wild and good for nothing. But Lady Mary and Colonel Hartley probably find some grounds for complaint in the bills he draws upon them. Even among the most dissipated 'renowners' of the University of Heidelberg, the name of the young English lord stands high on the list for drinking, gambling, and every sort of vice. And he is likely to proceed from bad to worse. For since we left Germany, his *roue* friend Lord Stokesleigh had all but persuaded him to spend the winter with him in Paris."

Poor Blanche was now as pale and nervous as her sister a quarter of an hour before,

"Hartingham is very young," pleaded she, in a faltering voice, "to be trusted alone on the Continent. If all these stories be true, there is more fault to be found with his parents than himself!"

"A remark which proves to me, my poor dear Blanche, how much less you know of him and his affairs than you fancy," retorted her sister. "He *would* go abroad. He set off at three days' notice, whether Colonel Hartley would or no. As for submitting to a tutor or governor, or anything of that kind, Hartingham was just in the mood when he left them to enlist as a Prussian dragoon or strolling player, if he had met with the slightest restraint or opposition. Lady Mary told me herself, that they were so frightened about him at the moment of his quitting England, that they thought themselves well off to have escaped his throwing himself into the Thames."

"Then some one must have used him shamefully ill," cried the warm-hearted little Louisa. "For when we used to see him day after day, he never had a sad thought for himself, or an unkind feeling towards any human being. Some one certainly used him ill."

"For which reason, you think him justified in behaving ill! Lou., Lou.! it is fortunate that Mrs. Temple left Downham before you were old enough to be lectured. However, I will go and look after your seal, that we may hear no further mention of Lord Hartingham's name till he has done something better worth talking of."

But though Helen had thus cruelly probed the feelings of her sister, (and even Blanche was forced into a conviction that the pain she felt had been wantonly inflicted,) nothing could exceed the care and delicacy with which she endeavored to keep watch and ward over Helen, when attacked by the tomahawk of Pro. Watts at his first visit to the hall.

The squire was terribly out of humor with his Downham neighbors for having presumed to fancy that indigestion could be better cured at Kissingen or any German spring under the sun, than at Bath, Bristol, Buxton, Tunbridge, or whatever spot in Great Britain boasts of waters too nauseous to be drunk as anything but physic.

"Sorry I can't compliment you, my dear Ma'am, on my friend Sir George's looks," was his first address to Lady Downham. "*He* tells me indeed, that starving himself to please the physicians, is the origin of his lantern jaws. But what need of doctors' prescriptions to ensure starving yourself in foreign parts! I warrant ye, soup meagre and sauerkraut will do the business for you, without much trouble. As to the German waters (as Barker was telling me t'other day,) they've ne'er a mineral spring in all Germany for which we haven't ten better in our own country."

"If Mr. Barker were able to prove his words my dear Mr. Watts," replied Lady Downham

blandly, (acting on her usual principle of charming the snake rather than scotching it,) "he might make a rapid fortune, by obviating all necessity for importing Seltzer water; and perhaps save many lives by pointing out to us the whereabouts of our English Ischl and Gastein."

"I'm not a dab-hand at your crack-jaw foreign names," retorted the squire, doggedly; "but trust me, as good and better than the springs you talk of, may be found on Hampstead Hill or the Peak of Derbyshire! But I'm glad to see, my dear Miss Helen, that if we can't compliment your papa on the amendment of his looks, *your* cheeks at least have nothing to complain of!"

At that moment, their bloom was indeed remarkable; so indignant was the haughty beauty at the strictures on her family hazarded by old Pro.

"We expected to see you a trifle dashed," resumed the undaunted squire, "after this disagreeable show-up about the Efferville match! Why, how in the world, my dear young lady, came you all to be so taken in? How in the world came you not to know what all Suffolk has known these eighteen months or more! 'Tis true you were never so much at the Castle as the rest of us. Since old Sir Jeremiah's death, somehow or other, your father and the Duke of Warton have never set their horses together."

"If you allude, Mr. Watts, to Lord Efferville's marriage with Lady Laura Knox," observed Lady Downham, coming to the aid of her step-daughter, "be sure that it affords greater pleasure to no one than to ourselves. On the confidential terms we were with Lord Efferville, it was naturally to *us* that he first confided his uncle's relenting in his favor."

The muttered interjection of old Pro. savored a *little* of incredulity.

"Then how the deuce came the newspapers to give us such a different account of the business?" cried he at length, on perceiving, by the self-satisfied face of Lady Downham, that she thought him convinced.

"Who can prevent their name from becoming the property of the press?" demanded Lady Downham, waxing wroth. "Some reporter probably travelled with us in the steamer, or saw us together at Frankfort; and concluded, from finding Lord Efferville included in a family party where there was an unmarried daughter, that matrimony must be in the case."

"Ay, sure! For which reason, (as my wife's talented friend Euphrasia Primwell observes in her 'Matronhood Considered,') heads of families are seriously called upon to contemplate the publicity, miscomprehension, and disappointment likely to result from such intimacies, when, having daughters to marry, they invite libertine young lords into their domestic circle."

"But Lord Efferville is not a libertine young lord," exclaimed Helen, indignantly resenting the inference. "And surely nothing could be more natural than our intimacy with a person about to marry one of our country neighbors."

"Not much of *neighborship* in the case, I fancy!" persisted the provoking Pro. "However, my dear, I'm heartily glad to find matters have gone no harder with you, and that you've no *grudge* against the Viscount. For you're likely, soon, to see enough and to spare of him! The wedding's to take place the end of January; and the young couple are coming to settle somewhere in the neighborhood."

This was evidently news at Downham Hall; for a glance of dismay was exchanged between Helen and her step-mother.

"The Duke of Warton won't hear of parting with his daughter," persisted Pro. "And I promise you, we're all looking forward with glee to having 'em near us."

"Some day or other, then," observed Lady Downham, with forced composure, "I trust that Helen and Blanche may profit by her acquaintance. But it will not be this winter; for they have received a pressing invitation from their grandfather and Lady Mary Hartley, to spend it at Glastonbury Castle."

"What! the proud old buck came to his senses at last?" cried Pro. Watts without noticing that this "pressing invitation" was as much news to the younger Miss Downham as the probability of having the Effervilles settled near them, to the elder. But vivid, indeed, were the blushes of surprise and delight of poor Blanche, who, bending over her embroidery frame in silence, had appeared to take much interest in the previous conversation; whereas on old Pro.'s return to Doesbury Lodge, news so alarming to the mother of her rustic adorer, (to whom of course the Hartingham episode was unknown,) produced the utmost consternation.

Meanwhile, no sooner had the Squire taken his departure from the hall, than the parties at whom he had been aiming *a bout portant*, appeared to feel doubly embarrassed. Helen could not but perceive that the artifices by which she had attempted to disguise her disappointment in the Efferville affair, were seen through by her sister; while Blanche was no less afraid of betraying too strongly her interest in her grandfather's invitation. She could not conceive why it had been kept a secret from her. Still less was she likely to conjecture that having been despatched to Helen and her future husband immediately on the announcement of her forthcoming marriage with the Viscount, the original concession had been artfully adapted to her own purposes, in order that she might escape from home at a moment when the Warton Castle festivities rendered her position so humiliating. For without admitting that her civilities were addressed to the future rank of her niece, it was impossible for Lady Mary to withdraw her request, or even refrain from extending it to Blanche, the moment that Helen admitted her earnest desire,—though *not* about to become a Viscountess,—to accept the hospitality offered.

The lapse of a few minutes after Pro. Watts' departure, sufficed to explain as much of this to Blanche Downham as that her faltering consent had been given to her visit to the home of her cousin's childhood,—the parents on whom depended the happiness of his life.

But again a few minutes, and bitter feelings of compunction suddenly expanded in her heart! Louisa, her poor little desolate Lou!—the paria of the family,—the outcast of the house,—what would become of *her*, if left alone with her careless mother? How would *she* support the absence of her only friend.

"It is very kind of papa to have given his consent to my accepting the invitation," murmured the self-rebuked Blanche, ashamed of having for a moment indulged in her selfish projects, and respectfully addressing Lady Downham; "and perhaps I may be able at some future moment to pay a visit to my grandfather. *This* winter, as Louisa is still so delicate, and so accustomed to my attendance, it will of course be better for me to remain quietly at the Hall."

Greatly relieved by this declaration, Helen, who knew that however amenable in trifling matters, her sister's mind, if made up on principle, was inflexible as that of a martyr, affected to dissuade her; appealing to Lady Downham whether Lou. would not be quite as well looked after by her nurse, whether Blanche remained at Downham, or took her departure.

But Lady Downham's plans coincided with the resolution of her younger step-daughter. Helen was not only to go, but to go alone; while Blanche must remain in charge of the invalid at the Hall; that *she* might be at liberty to accompany Sir George to London or elsewhere, whenever the interest of his speculations called him from home.

From the moment Blanche had made up her mind, she assisted cheerfully in her sister's preparations for departure. Perceiving that Helen was intent on producing a sensation at the Castle, she forced upon her sister her own moiety of Lady Emily's jewels, which had been divided between them by Sir George, the preceding year; and gave up all her little store of pocket money,—all her girlish treasures.—

"You must make the best of yourself, dearest Helen," said she, "in order that poor mamma's old friends may see you in the highest spirits, and admire you as you deserve."

That her sister was, on the contrary, deeply depressed, Blanche had grievingly discovered. The elastic step, sparking eyes, and buoyant temper of Helen were thoroughly tarnished. Her laugh was now a hollow laugh;—her wit forced;—her heart heavy. And with these embittered feelings, she was rushing into a new world; to wrestle without counsel or protection with the perils and dangers that surround the heroine of civilized life:—perils far more numerous and fearful than the dragons and monsters against which the damsels of chivalrous times were guarded by their knights of old!—

For both sisters, in short, the real struggle of life—the struggle of feeling,—had begun. But it was from the issue that those faculties and qualities were to be developed, which were to confirm to blanche and Helen their names of the Diamond, and the Pearl.

CHAPTER X.

Glastonbury retained, undiminished, its pristine renown of being one of the pleasantest of country-houses. Just as Colonel Hartley seemed not to know how to grow old, his house and household seemed incapaple of becoming old-fashioned (as even the best houses are apt to do;) and this was, perhaps, because no innovations were attempted. Introduce a few new articles of furniture, new wines, new dishes, or new personages, into a well-established household, and a disparity ensues that serves to point out how much of the old furniture is faded,—how many of the old guests have grown prosy,—how many of the beauties, hags; whereas so long as all is in keeping, no deficiency becomes apparent.

This well-judged unity produced an evenness of surface so wanting in her own home as to be particularly acceptable to Helen. Lady Downham, a petty economist where her personal pleasures were not affected, was perpetually changing her servants. Subservience to the queasy vanity of the touchy Sir George, rendered even her acquaintanceship uncertain. And the soul of Helen now took its ease in the well-drilled regularity of a house whose elegance was what the auctioneers call "regard less of expense;" and the well-bred ease of a circle, secure in its own consequence.

"Such would have been my life with Efferville!" mused the beautiful egotist, whose indignation against the levity which had placed her in a ridiculous light before the world did not suffice to invalidate the distinctions she should have attained as Lord Efferville's wife. "I would have made Efferville Abbey a paradise upon earth!"

Such a paradise as a Helen Downham was capable of imagining, comprised, of course, a good table and whist-table; a house whose invitations were never to be refused; and to join whose pleasant parties, all others were to be thrown over. And when, at the period announced by Probyn Watts, the marriage between the Viscount and Lady Laura was duly solemnized at Warton Castle, although a feverish patch burned upon Helen's cheek the livelong day on which the columns of the daily papers overflowed with details of the wedding, the beauty of the trousseau and lustre of the jewels of the bride, not a pang arose in her heart at the thought of those tender whispers and entrancing smiles addressed to another, which her inexperience had found so irresistible. All she deplored was the loss of her precedence as a Viscountess, and a position in the *beau-monde*, which she had intended should defy competition.

Something of these overweening ideas had, perhaps, transpired in her conversation with her aunt; or Lady Mary would scarcely have been tempted to recite in her hearing, in mock heroics, the grandiloquent description put forth by the *Morning Post* of these "Fashionable Hymeneals;" as a pretext for adding, "Thank goodness, the grand event has come off, and poor little Lady Laura made her first and last

sensation! For these Effervilles will form the most humdrum *menage!* Dull, disagreeable, insignificant people the Effervilles, from generation to generation!"

"*Nothing* is hereditary now-a-days, my dear Lady Mary!" observed Sir Horace Lumley, one of the fashionable loungers of the Castle, on whose example as a model-man of the world, poor Lord Hartingham had grounded his flippancy. "Even the gout skips a generation. I promise you that our Efferville is a prodigiously fast fellow. Nothing of Exeter Hall in *him!*—Eff. has cut off the entail of the family preciseness."

"Oh! there is no fear of young Efferville coming to mischief!" rejoined Lady Mary. "His guardian, the Duke of Warton, of whose favorite sister he is the son, has kept a sufficiently loose rein upon him, to let him fancy himself, even as a boy, his own master. But the young gentleman was drawn up short, the moment he attempted to have his own way! They persuaded him he was in love with his cousin Laura, before he had left off pinafores; and as soon as he was engaged to her past redemption, allowed him to amuse himself in London, till it became necessary to send him abroad at a moment's notice, to prevent his amusing himself too well."

"And the matter ended, I fancy, in his being sent for home again, post-haste, for something of the same reason," observed Sir Horace, coolly. "But the lad is now settled down in sober earnest; and perhaps, like other horses restive in single harness, he may turn out quiet enough in a team."

"Just what I told you ten minutes ago," cried Lady Mary, peevishly; "not only quiet enough, but *so* quiet, that I have no doubt we shall live to see him a Director of the Ancient Concerts, and presiding at the Agricultural meeting of his county. And now, who is for a drive to Holcombe Manor, to look at Mrs. Holcombe's Cochinchina poultry and pretty daughters?"

Holcombe Manor was the most attractive house in the neighborhood of Glastonbury; a house, indeed, which Lady Mary was likely to regard hereafter with some uneasiness, should her dear Hart. return from abroad without having the influence of her cousin Blanche replaced by some other charm more potent. For it was full of unmarried daughters and unmarrying sons; a house of the day, where the juvenile generation was in the ascendant, and Mr. and Mrs. Holcombe strictly brought up by their children. At present, it proved a pleasant resource to people fond of excitement as the Hartleys; and its everstirring atmosphere, into which Lady Mary was apt to plunge her guests at the Castle, whenever they appeared in want of revival, would afford, she hoped, means of diversion for her niece. The eldest son, Ralph Holcombe, was a far from despicable match. But Lady Mary, though piqued that Helen should have been so near securing an aristocratic alliance without her aid, had set her heart upon establishing her sister's daughter in the rank of life from which she considered that Lady Emily had derogated in stooping to ally herself with Downham Hall.

On the present occasion, however, being genuinely desirous that the fair companion of her visit should be diverted, Lady Mary was glad to find the family at home. In the large sociable, ample library in which the Holcombes spent their mornings, the hum of well-bred chat seemed to do its part in producing a genial atmosphere: half a-dozen work-tables and writing-tables being in play in various nooks of the room, with a praiseworthy activity of small-talk and Berlin wool. The Miss Holcombes were getting up contributions for a charity bazaar; a capital pretext for gathering round them all the young men in the neighborhood, from whose fathers' collections prints could be obtained for copying upon pincushions or portfolios; to say nothing of the officers of a crack regiment of dragoons from a garrison town just near enough to shoot the pheasants of Holcombe Manor, and flirt with its daughters. Flirting apart, however, they were good-humored unaffected girls, and welcomed Helen Downham as heartily as if her lovely face and graceful manners were not certain to throw their rusticity into the shade.

They would not allow their mother, who, remembering Lady Emily Hartley's marriage and Helen's birth, exerted herself to brush up her reminiscences, to weary their new acquaintance by importunate allusions. But, as speedily as possible without disrespect towards the old lady, drew off the young one into their camp; and began talking to her about what young ones love to talk of, new fashions, new music, new novels, and fetes past or to come. They were eager to learn from her the prevailing winter colors of the Rue Vivienne; and implored her to prevail on Lady Mary to show a good example to their father and mother, and enliven the neighborhood by sending out cards for a ball.

"If Hartingham were here," said Flora Holcombe, using the familiar privilege of an off-hand young lady of a certain age, "we should have had no need of much negotiation on the subject. One word to *him* suffices to make the mercury rise: nay, a list would be made out, and the invitations written, before Lady Mary heard a syllable of the matter; her acquiescence in any plan of her son's, being as certain as if prefaced with "*Le Roi le veut.*"

"In that case, my cousin's absence must be a loss to your society," said Helen coldly.

"Twice as great as that of any other member of it of twice his inches!" rejoined Miss Holcombe. "Colonel Hartley is too much of a sportsman to care for any part of the business of life which is transactable after dinner."

One of the sarcasms with which Helen was in the habit of taunting her sister whenever the name of their cousin Hart. was mentioned in their presence, rose nearly to her lips. But perceiving that treason against the young lord did not pass current in the North, she alluded slightly to their meeting in Germany, in proof

that he was not at present likely to forward the pastimes of Glastonbury.

"You saw Lord Hartingham in Germany?" exclaimed Lizzy Holcombe, instantly drawing her chair nearer to her guest, while one of her younger sisters instinctively followed up the movement. "And how was he looking? And what mischief was he doing? And when are we to see him again?"

Before Miss Downham had half replied to these inquiries, they were followed by as many more on the same subject; all tending to convince her that Blanche was by no means the only person in whose eyes the saucy boy was a man of consequence.

"Let me congratulate you on your return from Holcombe Manor, sound in wind and limb," whispered Sir Horace Lumley, on taking his usual place beside Helen that day at the dinner-table. "You are fortunate in having visited the bear-garden at the season of in-door recreations."

"I found the bears as tame as might be. I saw nothing but what was perfectly quiet and decorous," was Helen's reply.

"Because you were accompanied only by a quiet aunt. *I* had the misfortune to go there in autumn, escorted by young Hartingham; and before we had strolled ten minutes in the grounds, swings, merry-go-round, and bowls were in requisition in one corner or another; with such pretty little shriekings and squeakings, by way of accompaniment, as convinced me that the Glastonbury Cherubino was much less to be trusted in the midst of a covey of young birds like the Holcombes, than his papa and mamma seemed to surmise. Eh, Colonel?" continued he, raising his voice to address his somnolent host, who was apt to fill up the intervals of his jokes and horse-laughs after dinner by an audible doze.

"Ay, ay! Hart's a shocking fellow, Hart's a precocious young dog, if ever there was one!" replied Colonel Hartley, his vinous eyes twinkling with momentary glee. While Lady Mary, not sorry to impress upon her niece that her son's attention to Blanche had been merely such as he was in the habit of devoting to every pretty girl that came in his way, endeavoured to confirm Sir Horace's and her husband's insinuation, by observing that she should profit by Hartingham's absence to invite the Holcombe family to the Castle, which her son's foolish flirtation with Lizzy had of late rendered impossible. "There had been some coolness in consequence," she added, "between herself and the family."

"Give them a ball, and invite a regiment or two from C.," observed Sir Horace, "and all will be well. Parents with half a dozen daughters *a marrier*, are pacified by a ball."

"Ay, ay! *let's* have a ball!" cried Colonel Hartley, roused by the prospect of anything that sounded convivial. "A ball's necessary now and then to keep the blood of a country neighborhood in circulation." And when Helen confirmed the project by admitting that the Holcombes had urged her to suggest it to Lady Mary, orders were speedily issued to the house-keeper that the ball-room should be fresh waxed and dry-rubbed; and the cards were speedily sent out.

CHAPTER XI.

"Pray do you know why I couldn't have my ride in my Bath chair in the gallery this morning, my dear?" inquired the poor old Earl, when his daughter and grand-daughter paid him their daily visit on the morning of the grand event. "Roydon will have it you're going to give a ball to night! But I told him he must be mistaken (though he's not often mistaken); for you'd never think of giving anything gay in this house when Hart was away!—The place isn't the same thing without Hart. There'll be no one to dance,—no one to do the honors. No! you'd never think of bringing the neighborhood together during the absence of my grandson."

Though Lady Mary, with her usual facile *nonchalance*, humored the old man's notion, Helen could not refrain from a gesture of impatience at finding such an atom as her cousin thus unnecessarily magnified. Lord Efferville himself could not be thought more of in his family. For the notion of the doting old Earl seemed to have communicated itself to the whole establishment; and her own maid, taking up the tone of the steward's room, assured her that every one was shocked that a fete should be given at the Castle during the absence of their young Lord.

Their grumblings, however, were of small account to Helen. Her whole attention was engrossed by the grandeur of the establishment and refulgence of the house, when its splendors were made manifest in festive array. As she stood by Lady Mary's side in the gothic hall, where a brass band, wearing the family livery, welcomed the guests with the national anthem, as they passed over scarlet footcloths into the brilliantly lighted ballroom, she could not refrain from a momentary wish, that instead of playing a secondary part in the pageant, she were doing the honors as its liege lady. Dull, dowdy, Downham Hall flitted into her memory like a shadow in some sunny picture, by comparison with the scene before her!—

"What absent object has the good fortune to pre-occupy your thoughts?" inquired Sir Horace Lumley, as soon as he was able to penetrate the circle of squires and squiresses who were paying her the treble attentions due to the grand-daughter of their host, a London beauty, and an *elegante* lately arrived from Paris. But ere Helen found an instant to answer his bantering inquiry, a hum of excitement at some unexpected arrival was heard throughout the room, and both turned to learn its cause.

"When did he come?"—"How did he come?"—"Was he expected by the family?" was buzzed about on all sides.

"Something has happened. Let us hasten to see what is the matter," said Sir Horace. "How horribly these *gobemouches* remind one, my dear Miss Downham, of the fools in the

Castle of Otranto, when the gigantic helmet fell from the sky!"—

But Helen was in no mood to applaud his sallies.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Helen!" cried Lady Mary, coming forward from the crowd. "The most tiresome thing has happened, that is, the most *mal a propos*," she continued, perceiving that her words were overheard;—"Hart. is arrived!"—

"My cousin!"—exclaimed Helen, genuinely astonished.

"I was fetched out of the ball-room so mysteriously to my father's room," resumed her aunt, drawing the young lady confidentially into a window-recess,—"that I was afraid he had undergone an attack; when, lo! whom should I find with him but Hart.,—tired, hungry, and cold,—having travelled night and day from Paris."

"To be present at the ball!"—

Lady Mary slightly raised her shoulders.

"How little you know him!—He had not heard a word of it!—My son pretends to be greatly disgusted at the whole affair; and will not hear of joining us."

"He is quite right," replied Helen, with a supercilious smile.

"*Right?*" retorted Lady Mary Hartley, who, fresh from a fruitless argument with her son, was a little out of sorts. "Consider the offence to our neighbors."

"Has Lord Hartingham been much in the habit of considering their feelings?" inquired Helen, with an air of naivete.

"Not much, I admit. And there was no great reason that he should," retorted Lady Mary, not choosing that any one but herself should find fault with her son.

"Then why torment him now? The evening was progressing brilliantly before his arrival. Surely there is no *indispensable* occasion for his presence?"

'You are almost as disagreeable and absurd as himself, Helen. Just look at the ball-room!—Everybody standing still!—No one knowing *sur quel pied marcher!*—It would have been all very well if he had shown the discretion of keeping his arrival a secret. But saying nothing in interdiction to the servants, and allowing it to transpire, what could he expect but that the Colonel would be indignant at his not choosing to make his appearance, and that the whole party would break up!"

"You should get Miss Lizzy Holcombe to entreat the honor of his company, my dear aunt," insisted Helen, with a provoking smile.

"I have tried *that*—I have tried every thing," said Lady Mary, earnestly. "But Hart. has got some crotchet or other into his head. I can't conceive why he could not sleep quietly to-night at the hotel at P——, and come on to the Castle quietly in the morning (since he had made up his mind not to *show*), instead of disturbing everything in the selfish manner he has done."

"But if totally unprepared to find the Castle turned *sens dessus dessous* by a ball—"

"That's right, Helen!" interrupted the fractious lady. "Make out that he is perfectly justified in affronting the whole county!"—

"Believe me, there is nothing I have less at heart than Lord Hartingham's justification!" was Helen Downham's haughty rejoinder. Then, more to screen a family feud from vulgar observation, than from any relenting towards Lady Mary, she proposed that, since her cousin could not be persuaded to exhibit the light of his countenance, they should all do their best to remedy the confusion occasioned by his arrival, and replace the fete on its former footing.

Lady Mary assented; though too much annoyed to be either grateful or gracious. But Helen had now made up her mind to exert herself.—The ball should *not* be a failure. This malapert boy should learn that his presence was less essential than he imagined. Throwing aside at once, therefore, her previous air of listless impertinence, she returned to the ballroom,—set the orchestra and dancing in motion,—and provided partners for the neglected, and refreshments for the weary.—She was no longer recognizable; was ready to dance, talk, listen; and those who had begun the evening by declaring, that for a London belle, they thought Miss Downham wonderfully overpraised, were now ready to assert that in addition to the graces of personal beauty, she possessed those of good breeding and good nature.

"A charming girl!—Such a girl as one does not meet with once in an age!" was the hasty verdict of Ralph Holcombe, and a whole swarm of those foolish flies who are so readily taken by a spoonful of honey. While one or two country quizzes in shoe-buckles and shorts, whispered aside with a knowing smile, that "Lord Hartingham knew what he was about in not risking himself within the magic circle of so fine a woman."

Next morning, the fair Helen woke to the confusion of mind consequent upon over-fatigue and over-excitement. Resolved to testify no extraordinary interest in the arrival of her cousin, she could not repress the curiosity her pride forbad her to exhibit; and but that she had ample confidence in Lady Mary's incontinence of tongue, she would have taken some indirect means of ascertaining the cause of this sudden journey.

The day passed on, however, without explanation. Lord Hartingham, who showed himself for a moment in the dining-room at luncheon, was so cold and distant with her, as to make her feel less at home in the Castle than she had felt before during her visit; for every other lady staying in the house could boast of receiving greater civility at his hands than herself.

Colonel Hartley was not visible—no unusual thing in bad weather, when whist could be played in the library with closed doors and windows. But on this occasion, it was not his rubber that kept him out of sight. For when Lady Mary arrived to do the honors to her guests, it was clear, from her heightened complexion and husky voice, that she had been braving some sort of skirmish, either with her

son or husband, or both. She made such awkward *bevues*, miscalled so many names, and was so absent and over-civil, that Helen, if given to blushing, would have blushed for her want of self-command.

Even her own equanimity was however a little ruffled. For it had occured to her that Lord Hartingham's sudden return might originate in the expectation of finding Blanche on a visit to his grandfather; and his ill humor, by finding that the elder sister alone was Lord Glastonbury's guest. All this was mortifying enough. For her cousin was not alone no sort of acquisition to their party, but was already causing its dispersion.

"I am come to wish you good bye, my dear Miss Downham," said Sir Horace Lumley, following her into the morning-room, into which he had watched her retire after luncheon, "and to ask your commands for Hauteford Abbey."

"*Going*,—going *to-day?*" she replied, with evident vexation. "I understood that you had promised us a fortnight. Surely a *week* has not elapsed since your arrival?"

"My grateful thanks for the accuracy of your memory!—I shall begin to flatter myself I am not quite so superannuated or so great a bore as I fancied.—I arrived on Friday last."

"It is *we*, then, who are the bores, since you thus curtail your promised visit. Why in such haste to leave Glastonbury?"

"Not exactly for the same reason which is hurrying off Hugh Ferguson."

"*Lord* Hugh, too, on the wing? No, no!"

"Look! His phaeton is just coming round, with its full complement of boxes and chaise-seats. Last night, when poor Hart's arrival 'broke the good meeting with such admired disorder,' and caused whole flocks of poultry and coveys of partridges to leave the supper table untasted, 'I shall start early to-morrow, my dear fellow,' whispered Hugh. 'Think of the salmis and fricassees we shall have to digest if we venture to stay dinner!' Hugh, who lives to dine, fears nothing so much as a *rechauffee!*"

"And *you?*"

"To me an *echaffouree* is considerably more alarming. And unless I am much mistaken, the clouds are gathering for a domestic storm."

"At Glastonbury?" said Helen, with a vague glance towards the window; which Sir Horace interpreted into a *naive* idea that he alluded to the weather, whereas she was only taking a farewell look of Lord Hugh's admirable turn-out.

"At Glastonbury! And I therefore bequeath to you the exclusive enjoyment of poor Hartley's paternal explosions."

"No fear that they will be very alarming!" rejoined Helen, trusting she had now attained the heart of the mystery. "If Lord Hartingham's arrival have vexed his father, Colonel Hartley has been far too well brought up by his son to venture on more than four-and-twenty hours' resentment."

"Perhaps not;—if thousands of pounds were as easily come by, in these hard times, as when Hartley used to give I O U's on his own account."

"Do you mean that my cousin has been playing?"—inquired Helen carelessly. "Is there *no* vice that boy allows to slip through his fingers?"

"I said nothing about play. All I know is, that he is in want of money; and that, in the rashness of his innocent heart, he hurried hither to require payment of his debts by a father who has not had a guinea to call his own for the last—I will not say how many years!

"In plain words, then, Hart. has been running out at Paris; and is come here, like an honest lad, to cry 'peccavi,' and get his debts paid."

"Now, I understand you! But why is this to drive you to Hauteford Abbey?"

"Because I intertain a lively recollection of the troubled atmosphere that used to ruffle up twenty years ago, at Lumley Park, when I made my appearance there on a similiar errand. And now, my dear Miss Downham, I must say not adieu,—but *a revoir*,—trusting we may meet more agreeably in town."—

And as deliberately as the approach of footsteps would permit, he imprinted upon her hand a kiss as formal as was ever executed by Sir Charles Grandison; then, departed to the travelling carriage that was to convey him to Lord Hauteford's where he spoke of the Glastonbury ball as a "sad *bagarre*," and Lady Mary's niece as 'a prettyish cleverish girl,—who wanted forming!"

Alas! how often does such "formation," which is in fact *trans*-formation, convert the good, the true, the right-minded, into mere heartless people of the world!

CHAPTER XII.

Little did Blanche imagine, while quietly pursuing at Downham the even and useful tenor of her sway, that her sister was now domiciled under the same roof with her cousin. But even had she known it, she would not have permitted herself to dwell anxiously upon the circumstances. For Louisa, having passed a painful and precarious winter, was dependent upon her cheerfulness for the little light let in upon her dreary existence; and her father and mother appeared too thoroughly engrossed by Mammon-worship, to take heed of their daughters, sick or well.

Many girls so situated, would have waited grumblingly and despairingly, for better times. But Blanche set about making the best of her own destiny and that of her sister. She adopted a routine of occupation—of study—of good works; and allowed herself no idle moment for discontent. And if in that fire-light hour which so pleasantly closes a busy day, she sometimes permitted her ideas to range beyond the sphere of Downham Hall, it was not for herself that she dreamed and devised: it was to wish that her dear Helen might meet in the north with some suitable alliance, and be spared what she regarded as at once so odious and humiliating, as a match-making Lon-

don campaign. With an amiable, sensible companion, the gifted Helen would become as perfect as she was fair.

So argued the Pearl of the Diamond. But the Diamond, meanwhile, was far too much occupied in shining and dazzling, to take much thought of the sober-minded inhabitants of Downham Hall.

By Sir Horace Lumley's aimless communication concerning her cousin's affairs, Helen's views towards him were considerably changed. Since the coldness she had attributed to hauteur in his manner of accosting her on his arrival at Glastonbury, was simply the reserve occasioned by being out of spirits, the instincts of a woman's nature (not yet extinct in her heart,) suggested it as a duty to cheer and console him. In his palmy days of self-assurance, she had really disliked him. But, on finding that he could be hectored by his father and lectured by his mother, like any other delinquent of his years, she took him under her protection.

There was nothing alarming to her fancy in the debts he was said to have contracted; nor even in the allusion to Colonel Hartley's embarrassments so kindly made by Sir Horace. For to a girl of her age, such a fortune as Lord Glastonbury's appears inexhaustible; ten or fifteen thousand a year in process of spending, conveying a vague impression of the proprietorship of Fortunio's purse.

She conceived, therefore, when she saw the boozy Colonel sulking for days with his son, and Lady Mary taciturn and resentful, that they were endeavoring, tardily but never too late, to afford him a lesson.

The lesson being disagreeably prolonged, however, it was far from disagreeable to the young Paria, who for the first time found himself huffed, to be kindly and coaxingly accosted by the beautiful cousin who had hitherto treated him so disregardfully. He felt it the more, because, as if to deepen the odium of his own misdemeanors, every body at Glastonbury took occasion to praise his cousin. The poor old Earl persisted in calling her his own lovely Emily. Colonel Hartley swore she was the first horsewoman in England. Lady Mary declared her to be the life and soul of the house. While the Miss Holcombes and their mother, to prove that they were neither envious nor jealous of the London belle, insisted that she was the most distinguished-looking of the numerous aristocratic London beauties who had brightened the Castle coterie.

Lord Hartingham began to think he had undervalued the fair cousin who was so much the more kind and conciliating for seeing him "bullied by the governor;" and was really flattered when she consulted his taste about what songs she should sing, or valses she should play, when a dinner at Holcombe Manor, some days afterwards, was crowned with that one greater evil than a country dinner-party,—"a little music."

The truth was, though Lord Hartingham's careless nature did not detect it, that his heart had been drawn towards her in the first instance by the sort of indefinable family resemblance that often exists between sisters whose features, form and character, are really dissimilar. Certain words, certain intonations of voice, a manner of taking up a book or laying down her work, brought Blanche (from whom he had now been ten months parted) before his eyes, whenever he was talking to Helen; or rather, rendered him conscious of a vague happiness by association with those pleasant times, when the absent one was all in all to his heart. By degrees, the feeling invested itself in the beauteous cousin by his side. How could it be otherwise? She took so much pains to please him! And a very lovely girl who takes pains to please a very young man, must have a hard heart to deal with, if it do not meet her half-way.

Lady Mary sat by, neither blind nor unobservant, but without fear. Apprehensive that the moment her son's embarrassments were removed, he would start off anew for Paris, and resume the ruinous dissipations in which he had been involved, she was well content to detain him at the Castle, by no matter what attraction. And when her son, though little in the habit of late of confiding his impressions to her, admitted how great an improvement he found in his cousin, she replied, "Yes! Helen is everything I could wish. Had you taken a fancy to *her*, Hart., instead of that stupid, yea-nay sister, there would have been some excuse for you. Helen has sense and spirit. Helen is formed to shine in society. Helen would have done us honor as the representative of our family. If anything happened to me, I should have felt satisfied to leave your sisters to be brought up and brought out by Helen. I look on her, in fact, as far more my daughter than my niece; and it is a great act of self-denial on my part to advise her against accepting Ralph Holcombe; for you may judge what a comfort it would be to have her settled at Holcombe Manor for life."

In all this, Lady Mary went so far as to have overshot her mark, had Lord Hartingham for a moment supposed that her tirade really purported to govern his choice of a wife. But his mother's harangues were ever suggested by the caprice of the moment; and he knew that she was as likely to condemn Helen to-morrow, as Blanche to-day. His Paris experience had moreover induced some change in his own cameleon-like nature.

"Had Blanche become my wife," he sometimes reflected, amid the excitement of continental society, "all this would have been forbidden-fruit. Among these charmers, 'pleasant, but wrong,' Blanche would have been as miserable as she would be out of place. I am afraid my mother judged rightly! There is, alas! little sympathy of character between her and me!"

And if such an opinion had once glanced into his mind, it was not likely to lose ground now that the smiles and charms of Helen were thrown into the scale.

Helen's position in the family, meantime, was a thousand fold improved by having become an object of attention to Hart. The Colonel, seriously alarmed by the first indications of

vice and extravagance on the part of his son, was not only charmed to see him settle down quietly at the Castle, but charmed with the charmer whose presence had effected the miracle. As to the poor, declining old Earl, he was overjoyed to get his darling boy near him again, and supremely happy whenever his handsome grand-son and "darling Emily" were disposed to come and sit with him, while Roydon went to dinner; the boy reading the newspaper aloud, while the girl knitted or netted. He sometimes embarrassed them, indeed, by declaring that "it was a thousand pities they were not brother and sister, that they might always be together and never quit his roof." But it was worse still when he added, that "Royden could not see things in *that* light; that Roydon, whose judgment was worthy of the woolsack, thought it would be far better if they were to make up their minds to become man and wife."

"What a different place this old ghost-hole would become under the auspices of youth, beauty, and sprightliness like hers!" mused Lord Hartingham, on perceiving how much more briskly circulated the blood in the veins of the superannuated establishment, now that Helen influenced its movements. "After all, I was wrong to think Glastonbury Castle such a bore. With whist for a pastime and not a business, and hunting for an occasional recreation and not a duty, it is really not much more tiresome than the usual routine of country houses."

But though Lord Hartingham was just then as much out of love with Blanche as nineteen is certain to be with the object which eighteen found adorable, the young Paladin boasted of a certain sense of honor, which seemed to render it impossible for him to offer his hand to the sister of her to whom he had once offered his heart. Nor would she, perhaps, ever have turned the question in her mind, had not Lady Mary, in imploring her one day to make Glastonbury so pleasant to her son that he would not dream of returning to the continent, allowed it to be apparent that she did so in perfect self-security:—that, as it was impossible for Hart. to think of matrimony with a sister of Blanche Downham, he might flirt to his heart's content.

"We shall see!" was Helen's mental comment on these selfish calculations. "Since my egotist of an aunt chooses to angle with a golden hook, she can have no right to be angry should the fish prove too strong for her, and carry off the tackle!"

Her first manœvre towards effecting the mental revolution she desired, was by frequent and seemingly frank allusions to Downham and her sister.

"Blanche," she said, "was all the happier for her absence. Blanche had *very* peculiar notions on religion, politics, family affection, nay, almost every possible subject. A certain feebleness of constitution, produced perhaps by the ill-health under which her mother was sinking at the period of her birth, rendered Blanche unequal to the fatigue of society; and she had consequently determined to relinquish what is called the world."

Lord Hartingham colored and looked uneasy; but hazarded no inquiry.

"Fortunately for her," resumed Miss Downham, "the infirmities of our poor, dear little sister Lou. have afforded in her own family an object for the expansion of her benevolent energies. But for that, she would have perhaps become a professional philanthropist,—a Mrs. Fry,—or a Sarah Martin. And sainthood and martyrdom," added Helen, "though they may lay up treasures in heaven, are only too apt on earth to bring down ridicule and annoyance."

"And how *is* poor little Louisa?" inquired Lord Hartingham, shifting the question of Blanche's sainthood and martyrdom.

"If you like, I will read what my sister says of her in her last letter," replied Helen. And though her companion gave no token of encouragement, she took a letter from her pocket and ran lightly over its contents.

"You must not be offended, dearest sister, if I own myself quite reconciled to your announcement of having promised to prolong your sojourn at Glastonbury, by the leisure it will afford me to devote to our dear Lou., who is growing more and more dependent upon my care. Never again express by the way your regret at my being so closely confined by my attendance upon her. So long as I find myself useful, I am content.—My vocation, I sometimes think, was to be a deaconess, or a *sœur de charite*; for I am much happier after arranging Louisa's pillows or reading her to sleep, than ever you found yourself in a London ball-room.—To work out one's salvation by good work in one's own family, is a lot reserved for few.—How different had it been to devote to strangers—perhaps to thankless strangers—those hours and labors which I have the happiness of dedicating to the kindest little invalid in the world! If you *must* pity me, Helen, be it for the probability that this precious life may not be prolonged; and that I may have to wander in a strange world, seeking after objects of interest which ill repay the search."

"By all this, I fear," added Miss Downham, folding up the letter with an air of tender sympathy, "that poor Louisa is rapidly declining."

Lord Hartingham looked embarrassed; and even felt a little heartsore while momentarily reverting to the gentle being whose good qualities had for a time attached and purified his heart. But the prevailing impression left by the letter was, that Blanche was of too exalted a nature for his taste,

> *too* good
> For human nature's daily food.

and when next he turned towards Helen, whose cheeks were brightened by exercise, and her eyes by the consciousness of her power over him, he could not help admitting that his parents understood him better than he understood himself. He was unworthy the partnership for life of such an angel as Blanche.

Helen meanwhile was becoming the dupe of her own coquetries. She had commenced her flirtation with her cousin without malice or

steadfast intent either to supplant her sister, or become a peeress and lady paramount at the Castle. But while she trod "the primrose paths of dalliance," the pleasantness of the road beguiled her on. There was a peculiar grace in Hartingham's manner when he sought to recommend himself which had already charmed her into forgetfulness of the disparity of years. She preferred his company to that of any other person at the Castle; and in addition to this unconscious yielding of nature, her worldly ambitions were so gratified by the deference of which, as lady of his thoughts, she found herself the object, that to relinquish her fantastic supremacy would have been a sacrifice.

Above all, *any* prospect was preferable to returning to Downham! By letters anterior to the one exhibited to Hart., she had learned from Blanche that great reductions were taking place in her father's establishment; that he and Lady Downham were wretchedly out of spirits; and that there was not the slightest chance for their repairing to London for the season. There were even whispers that the house was about to be let for a term of years; and that they were to reside at some quiet watering-place, for the health of Louisa.

In such prospects, how little inducement to the petted idol of Glastonbury Castle to submit to the career awaiting Miss Helen Downham! Rather,—*almost* rather,—become Mrs. Holcombe of Holcombe Manor, and enter a large, cheerful, kind, and pleasure-loving family, than abide with a father and stepmother whose thoughts were shut up in a banker's book, and whose careworn faces excluded all sunshine from the house.

Such an alternative would not perhaps have suggested itself as a forlorn hope to her mind, but that at the moment of receiving one of Blanche's melancholy epistles, expressing fears that her father's affairs were seriously embarrassed and that poor dear little Lou. would be the sufferer by the necessary curtailment of her comforts, the Castle happened to be full of visitors, by whose claims to attention her own were partly thrown into the shade.

The Duke and Duchess of Dumfries, with their two unmarried daughters, Lady Augusta and Lady Marian Delaval, were come to spend some days with the Hartleys on their way to town from Dumfries Palace; the Duchess occupying a post in the royal household, which necessitated her being early in London. The daughters were dull, heavy girls; neither ill-looking nor ill-mannered, but afflicted with a constitutional apathy easily to be mistaken for insolence. While guests at Glastonbury, Lord Hartingham naturally belonged to them in order of precedence, and they to Lord Hartingham; and as they had no previous acquaintance with Helen, and had none of that readiness of speech which promotes intimacy among young people, they sat apart from her, in their strait-laced long-waisted robes of state, so well adapted to their long, formal, inexpressive faces; till she began to feel there was a great gulph fixed between the daughter of an *obscure country* baronet and the right honorable daughters of a gartered Duke and courtly Duchess.

Having taken it into her head that the object of the Duchess's visit was to promote an alliance between one of her solemn daughters and Lord Hartingham, she fancied that the colloquy carried on in ominous whispers on the sofa between the two mamma's, must relate to the arrangement of the preliminaries; whereas the dialogue really consisted in lamentations on the Duchess's part over the frightful dissipation of the youth of the age, and the expression of a hope, on Lady Mary's, that her son "having commenced sowing his wild oats," (at an age when most little boys are sowing mustard and cress!) "he would sober down by an early settlement in life." As to dreaming of an alliance between their offspring, Lady Augusta Delaval, with her few thousand pounds' portion, would have been as odious to Lady Mary, as to the Duchess a son-inlaw already admitted into circles, a mere allusion to which caused her eyes to roll epileptically in their sockets. But that her daughters participated in her holy horror of reprobates, she would not have risked their happiness by a visit to Glastonbury Castle during the sojourn of the handsome Lord Hartingham.

It was only, indeed, the power of custom which took them there at all. The venerable Earl being a near family connection, she had been in the habit of paying him a visit every three or four years.

On one of the days of their visit, a large detachment of the Holcombes was invited to make up the party. And though the still-life young ladyships, if pleased with the easy good-humor of the Miss Holcombes, were petrified at their familiarity with Lord Hartingham, the Duchess, who had been in the habit of meeting at all her former visits, the worthy, homely, motherly Mrs. Holcombe, signified her satisfaction at renewing the acquaintance: delighted to have secured a right-thinking unsophisticated squire's wife to listen to her homilies upon the immoralities of the times, and chime in with her commination.

The rowly-powly old lady of the Manor was, however, little addicted to anathema. She was moreover in extra good humor at perceiving that her hopeful and best-beloved Ralph, occupied for once Lord Hartingham's usual post beside Miss Downham:—not only from knowing him to be desperately in love with the fair Helen, but from knowing the fair Helen to be as good a match for *him* as Lord Hartingham for one of his sisters.

Unused to tricks or manœuvres of any kind, the moment she was brought into play by the Duchess, she showed her cards.

"It was a son of yours, I think, Mrs. Holcombe, who took Lady Mary Hartley's niece in to dinner yesterday and to-day?" inquired her Grace of the country neighbor, as they sat together taking coffee. To which inquiry Mrs. Holcombe replied, with an assenting smile.

"A pleasing-looking, modest young man!" added the Duchess, to whom Ralph Holcombe's sheepishness said much in his favor. "For what profession do you intend him?"

To which Mrs. Holcombe replied, drawing herself up with some majesty, "that being her eldest, he would succeed to his father's estate."

"Had it not been my eldest," resumed Mrs. Holcombe, smilingly and confidentially, never desirous to drop the conversation when her children were the topic, "your Grace would scarcely have seen him occupying a place by the side of Miss Downham."

Now, on Miss Downham, the Duchess had never wasted a thought. She knew her to be the daughter of her cousin Lord Glastonbury's daughter. But having always heard that Lady Emily had married some nobody, who was married again to some other nobody, and lived in the country where nobody ever heard of him, she considered Lady Mary only too kind in chaperoning this obscure niece occasionally to some London ball, and having her on a visit at Glastonbury Castle. To Mrs. Holcombe's insinuation, therefore, she replied by a smile of bland incomprehension.

"Miss Downham is an heiress!" replied the candid old country-gentlewoman. "But that he is so much too young for her, she would be an excellent match for her cousin Lord Hartingham!"

Even among personages as disinterested as is compatible with the meanness of civilized life,—model-duchesses,—clap-trap patriots,—and other *professors* of moral philosophy,—it is astonishing what a sensation is caused by mere mention of an heiress.

The first time her Grace of Dumfries could command the private attention of the hostess, it was impossible for the mother of several younger sons, and aunt of many indigent nephews, not to say, "You never told me, my dear Lady Mary, that your pretty niece was an heiress."

"An *heiress?*—Absurd!—Who *can* have been talking such nonsense to you, my dear Duchess?" cried Lady Mary, in a manner too full of impulse to be assumed. "Poor Emily left two daughters, who will have fifteen hundred a-year between them, when both are of age. But even in these moneyless days, an income of seven hundred and fifty pounds a year, scarcely constitutes an heiress."

"Certainly not. And as I could not forbear saying to Mrs. Holcombe, had Miss Downham really been an heiress, one should have heard enough of her in London, last season."

"Enough, indeed! What a fuss was made with that Miss Wilson Thompson, the Yorkshire girl, with her five thousand a-year, who refused half the Life Guards, and I know not how many sons of peers!"

"It is really disgraceful to the country," sighed the Duchess, "to witness the proportion of interested matches among us; and the more so, because in England, riches so abound."

"There are certainly great fortunes in England," replied Lady Mary, languidly adjusting her scores of bracelets. "But I suppose there is no country where wealth is more unequally divided. However, in point of interested marriages, shabby as we are, it is only in England a love-match is ever heard of! At present we do not *boast* of our *mariages de convenance*."

Again, the Duchess shook her head over the bad habits daily introduced among us from the continent. And satisfied on the point of Helen's heirship, secretly congratulated herself that she had not, on the strength of Mrs. Holcombe's erroneous information, invited her kinswoman too warmly to Delaval House or Dumfries Palace.

Lady Mary, meanwhile, took an early opportunity to testify to poor old Mrs. Holcombe her displeasure that she should have presumed to gossip to the Duchess concerning the family affairs of Glastonbury Castle.

"How came you to tell the Duchess of Dumfries, my dear Mrs. Holcombe, that Helen Downham was an heiress?" said she, after decoying the old lady into her dressing-room for the purpose of reading her a lecture. "It is always bad taste to talk about the pecuniary affairs of our friends, even when well-informed on the subject. But it is really hardly fair to circulate groundless rumors which, some day or other, will be said to have originated with *me*, when some disappointed suitor discovers that my niece's heirship consists in a few paltry hundreds a-year."

"I must beg your ladyship's pardon," said the old lady, a little taken aback, but drawing up stiffly on finding herself thus unceremoniously called to account. "The Downham property brings in something like nine thousand!"

"When my sister married into the family, it was rated at half that sum," persisted Lady Mary coolly. "And you are, perhaps, not aware that there are three daughters to share it at the death of Sir George, who has an excellent life."

"I am vastly glad to hear it, for the sake of his family," retorted the old lady firmly. "Still, sooner or later, my dear lady Mary, we must all drop:—and at her father's decease, Miss Downham succeeds to the enjoyment of a splendid fortune!"

Again did Lady Mary plead the two sisters. And this time, the poor old lady was piqued into declaring that she had ascertained the fact from the most unimpeachable authority. On discovering her dear Ralph's attachment to Miss Downham, she had considered it her maternal duty to write to Suffolk, (to a cousin of hers who resided in the neighborhood of Downham Hall, and had known Sir George's daughters from their childhood,) in order to satisfy herself respecting the young lady's temper and principles. "And when Mrs. Probyn Watts favored me with a reply," continued Mrs. Holcombe, "she added to the particulars I had asked, that the property of the late Sir Jeremiah Downham was entailed, failing heirs male, upon his eldest granddaughter."

"I have little doubt, ma'am, that you and your son are far better informed on the subject than I can pretend to be," was Lady Mary's bitter reply, for she had always resented Ralph Holcombe's attentions to her niece; and now that she had reason to ascribe

them to sordid calculation, had no patience with his presumption. "I, who have some little right to feel interested in her welfare, never took upon myself to institute inquiries concerning the amount of her fortune."

"Again I must ask your ladyship's pardon," cried the indignant old gentlewoman. "My letter contained not the slightest allusion to Miss Downham's fortune."

"Oh, no!—of course.—You merely stated to this Mrs. Watts, whom I remember at Downham twenty years ago, the wife of a gentleman-farmer in the neighborhood, or something of that sort,—people by no means on terms with my brother-in-law to be admitted into the confidence of his affairs."—

"Not into the confidence of *Sir George's* affairs, perhaps," retorted Mrs. Holcombe warmly, highly indignant in her turn.—"But, with your Ladyship's permission, Sir George had a father who, being only a country banker of the name of Smith, was the friend and man of business of Mr. Probyn Watts; who in his turn, rendered him the service of witnessing his will. Harman, of Ipswich, who succeeded Sir Jeremiah in his banking business, is one of the trustees."

Lady Mary had now ascertained all she wanted to know:—and, nothing daunted by Mrs. Holcombe's ire, proceeded to secure her future discretion by observing, "in *that* case I think he might just as well abstain from commenting on the contents. As a country-neighbour of the Downhams, it shows bad taste and bad feeling on *his* part to make their affairs a matter of discussion: and I must say, that were I in Sir George's place, and aware of his gossiping, I would never exchange a word with him again."

Mrs. Holcombe, feeling herself talked at, had a great mind to be affronted. But, too provident a mother to risk the loss of so valuable a house of call as Glastonbury Castle, for the maintenance of her own dignity, she blew her nose sonorously, and prepared with a careless face to quit the room.

But the sense of indignity she carried home with her to the Manor, was nothing to the flutter of spirit she left behind! Lady Mary, though she had seen fit to discredit the authority of Probyn Watts, was perfectly aware that no one had further insight into the affairs of Downham Hall; and since *he* pronounced Helen to be an eldest son, an eldest son she was. After congratulating herself, therefore, on the levity with which her son appeared to be transferring his affections from the younger to the elder sister, her first anxiety was to conceal the important fact she had discovered, from the knowledge of her husband and son.

That Helen had been kept in the dark with regard to her interests, Lady Mary was certain; from conversations she had occasionally held with her respecting her father's second marriage. Her best policy, therefore, was to throw the young people constantly together, that their liking might ripen into love, before the question of money came on the *tapis*.

Great, therefore, was her satisfaction, when Lord Hartingham exclaimed on seeing the dining-table reduced to its ordinary dimensions, by the departure of the Duchess and her aristocratic daughters,—"Thank goodness those very heavy pieces of furniture, the Delavals, have been moved out of the way! Thank goodness we are alone again! To-night, dear Helen, we shall enjoy with double zest, our fight over the chess-board!"

Thus encouraged, Lady Mary took care they should enjoy it indisturbed, for that, and many evenings to come.—Deaf to the Colonel's hints that "it was about this time Lord Stokesleigh, and Knox, and several other fellows who only wanted reminding, had promised to come to them for a few days, which would enable them to get up a rubber," she pleaded the necessity of keeping the house quiet, that she might devote more attention than she had lately been able to give to her father, whom Roydon thought poorly.

With Helen, she maintained a line of conduct equally astucious. "Quite right my dear,—a very sensible and ladylike letter!" said she, on returning to her niece the epistle in which Ralph Holcombe's proposals for her hand, were formally rejected. "I can't conceive how it ever entered the booby's head, that a girl with your pretensions, would stoop to become the Lady Bountiful of Holcombe Manor, to fatten upon beef and beer and the exercise of the cardinal virtues."

Helen Downham was too happy in swallowing the flattery, to notice the hook to which the attractive bait was attached. But though herself a gudgeon, she was not the less cunning angler in her turn, when occasion presented itself.—So naively did she suffer herself to be checkmated twice that very evening by Lord Hartingham, to whom, both at chess and billiards, she was qualified to give twenty points, that in the course of their ride to covert the following morning, he made his formal declaration; entreating her to overlook his lack of years and fortune and become his wife, as soon as the governor and Lady Mary could be induced to yield their consent. And though it was the last meet of the season, and they had actually caught a glimpse of the red coats before she could be prevailed upon to sanction his intended appeal to Colonel Hartley, he magnanimously turned back with her towards the Castle.—The fox by his side proved the greater attraction!

That his parents, who had declared on the avowal of a passion for Blanche, that it was out of their power to make him an allowance such as would enable him to settle in life, could be brought to favor his present views, he certainly did not believe possible. But he was determined to make a hard fight for it; and, if necessary, to appeal to the liberality of his grandfather. Above all, his lovely Helen (prepared for any sacrifice rather than return to the subordination and straits of Downham Hall) assured him that, far from desiring a separate establishment, her only wish was to reside with his family, both at the Castle and in town.

This was a great point gained. For the experience of the last six months, since emanci-

pated from the parental bit and bridle, had tended to convince Lord Hartingham that, when guineas and louis d'ors are scarce, the parental rack and manger form a highly satisfactory resource. Rendered bold by this reassurance, he hastened to ask an audience of his mother who, fully prepared for the result, had scarcely patience to listen to his very superfluous preamble.

"When a man of his age," he said, "was placed, by the imprudence of his family, in habits of daily intercourse with a beautiful girl, they had only themselves to thank if an imprudent attachment should arise."

Choosing to play out the farce to the end, Lady Mary replied that—"aware of his passion for her younger niece, she had supposed it impossible for Helen to obtain any other interest in his eyes, than as the sister of Blanche." By which plausibilities, however, her dear Hart. was not to be silenced.

"No, no, mother!" cried he, "you had no right to suppose anything of the kind. You told me, last summer, that my liking for Blanche was a boyish whim that had not six months' endurance in it; and on my arrival here, must have known perfectly, by the life I had been leading at Paris, that your prophecies had come to pass. I repeat, that it is solely your own fault if my heart and hand are no longer at my own disposal. Be a dear good mammy, therefore, and settle it all for me with my father."

Lady Mary endeavored to repress the telltale twinkle in her eyes, which betrayed her secret joy; and gravely shook her head.

"You won't say, *this* time, I hope, that I have chosen a person unsuitable to my nature!" continued her son. "Every idea of Helen's and mine is in common! If ever two people had a right to be happy together, it is my cousin and myself!"

Certain that her acquiescence would be reported to her niece, Lady Mary condescended to agree with him. But to keep up a decent show of opposition, previous to undertaking his cause with the Colonel, she cited the disparity of years,—"Helen was two years his senior!"

"Ten or fifteen years hence," replied her son, "two years' difference of age between us will not be so much as noticed! And since determined to marry young, surely it is better that my wife should know something of the world, than that we should be boy and girl together!"

Lady Mary's assent to this proposition was qualified by a hint that at all events, to marry in his teens, was an act of imprudent folly. "At least, wait till he was of age!"

Till he was of age?—Two years?—An eternity! Naturally enough, the self-willed boy would not hear of such a postponement.

"Helen was of age last Thursday, my dear mother," cried he, "and let that serve for us both. Now-a-days, every body marries young: Lord Dunbar was only twenty—Rhodes just my age. Of the four marriages that took place last spring among your own acquaintance, mother, only one of the bridegrooms had attained years of discretion!"

The truth of this assertion, Lady Mary was forced to admit. But she endeavored to recall to mind and repeat, some of the cogent arguments she had heard enforced on occasion of these very matches. She suffered herself, however, to be, if not convinced, gradually overtalked; and appeared to succumb reluctantly to her son's entreaties that she would explain all to his father.

All she *chose* to explain was, that, since their headstrong boy had set his mind on an early marriage, it was as well that his choice had fallen upon her niece; who was content to rough and smooth it with themselves.

"As regards fortune," continued Lady Mary, "she is entitled to between seven and eight hundred a year at once; besides a share of her father's property hereafter."

And as she took care to make this communication after dinner, when Colonel Hartley surveyed all sublunary things through the sunshine of a bottle of claret, she did not find him hard to be persuaded. The play-debts incurred by his son in Paris, reconciled him to the idea of his settlement in life; and if he *must* marry, Helen Downham would be far from an ineligible daughter-in-law. She suited the Colonel better than most girls; was not missish; rode well; delighted in out-of-door exercises; and in rainy weather, could not only stand a game at billiards, but even take a hand at whist. Above all, she knew the ways of the house; and the whole affair might be got through "with less fuss and ceremony than usually renders a wedding such a confounded nuisance."

Before the evening was over, in short, Helen had been kissed and congratulated by the whole family, as the future Lady Hartingham: till the happy lover, whom the novelty of his situation transported into twice the lover he had been the preceding day, began almost to miss the excitement of the opposition he had anticipated. Everything went smooth. Every body was pleased. And the hopes and wishes of Helen having once been crossed, she understood the better the value of her present position.

It was not till the halo of this perfect beatitude was dissipated by an inquiry that arose of who was to communicate their intentions to Downham Hall, that each became suddenly conscious of the insecurity inseparable from hollowness of heart. Not one of them was in a position to be honest. Both Helen and Lord Hartingham knew that, however fair a surface they might put upon the matter, they had behaved towards Blanche as one so good and true should never have been treated—even by an enemy. On the other hand, Colonel Hartley dared not make such proposals to Sir George Downham for his daughter's hand as would necessitate the exposure of the shattered state of his affairs. While Lady Mary dreaded that the moment of explanation would bring her own duplicity to light; and that, when her dear Hart. discovered he had been manœuvred into marrying an heiress, and Helen that she had been hurried into pledging her hand unapprized of its positive value, the alliance might fall to the ground.

But of the whole set, Helen, who, from her age and sex, should have abounded in candor,

was perhaps most in fear of an *eclaircissement*. Unable to surmise to what degree her father's embarrassments might operate upon her fortune, every succeeding letter from her sister apprized her that nothing could be more painful than the state of affairs at Downham Hall. Yet beyond an occasional hint to Lady Mary that she was afraid Lady Downham had infected her father with the prevailing rage for speculation, she had never uttered a syllable likely to place her visit to Glastonbury in the light of an escape from a precarious home. And when Colonel Hartley suggested that, perhaps, after all, the best thing would be for Hartingham to start at once for Downham, and make his proposals in person, though too prudent vehemently to oppose the scheme, she contrived to make her enamored cousin sensible of the impossibility of quitting her side.

"The fact is, my dear boy," said the Colonel, when alone with his son, "it is out of my power to make an offer that would look even tolerably well upon paper. There's no concealing the matter, Hart., that Helen Downham's a plaguy deal better match for *you* than you for *her*."

"Provided *she* is content,"—Lord Hartingham was beginning.

"Ay, ay,—that's all very well," interrupted the Colonel. "But when it comes to black-and-white explanations with that long-headed father of her's—who, being a banker's son, has, I dare say, the pounds, shillings and pence table at his finger's ends—you will find yourself looking confoundedly small!"

The young lord, whose besetting weakness it was to look considerably bigger than was necessary, instantly gave up all thoughts of an expedition to the Hall.

"In point of blood, we have decidedly the best of it," resumed the Colonel, who could not bear to hear his darling son disparaged even by himself. "But in point of the stumpy, my dear boy, I'm afraid that Downham will exact settlements, which I could as easily make as pay off the national debt."

This conversation, translated out of slang into civilized language, Lord Hartingham repeated to the lady of his love. He thought it right she should know the worst. He thought it right she should be warned of the probability of opposition on the part of Sir George. But, alas! Helen was not moved by his ingenuousness to be ingenuous in her turn. Not a syllable did she confide to him of the embarrassments of Downham Hall.

"Were not my grand-father in so infirm a state of body and mind, dearest Helen," added the young lord, "he would have settled everything for us at once! He would have acted as mediator. He would have obviated all necessity for a disagreeable personal explanation with Sir George."

Lady Mary, when taken into their counsels, was of the same opinion. But this did not serve to remove the difficulties of the case. And both Helen and her adorer were beginning to look so downcast that it was perhaps an act of humanity on the part of the fond mother to suggest "that if secure in mutual attachment, they had nothing to fear; that, since her niece was of age, Sir George's opposition would be no legal impediment." Adding, by way of palliative to her lesson of filial impiety, "he showed such utter disregard to the interest of his daughters in his second marriage, that he can scarcely expect to find them implicitly obedient."

On this hint, Lord Hartingham spake; but not till he could command the private ear of his affianced bride.

"After all, why solicit a consent which it was next to certain would be refused? It was to himself, a minor, parental authorization was necessary. As to his darling Helen, she was by law her own mistress; and as regarded feeling and sentiment, was not Lady Mary, her mother's only sister, a more fitting representative of that mother than a Lady Downham, sprung from no one knew where, to usurp her mother's place? Far better marry at once, and teach Sir George the wisdom of sanctioning a measure it was no longer in his power to prevent."

Helen demurred; partly from the decent womanly instinct still alive in her heart, partly from her secret hankering after a showy London wedding, with its due allowance of Brussels' lace and bridesmaids.

"There was something so degrading," she said, "in an elopement—something so vulgar in the very name of Gretna Green!"

"But this is no question, dearest, of Gretna Green," pleaded Lord Hartingham. We might be married by special license in the Castle Chapel by old Hawkhurst, my grand-father's chaplain. And the world, which can never be completely *au fait* to what has been passing behind the scenes, will suppose the ceremony was concluded in this sort of quiet way, in compliment to Lord Glastonbury's state of health."

The special license, the domestic chaplain, and the chapel of Glastonbury Castle, constituted, in Helen's opinion, some palliatives to the sort of marriage proposed; though it was vexatious that no pompous column of newspaper report was to vie with the brilliancy of the Efferville solemnization. Still, having hesitated about refusing the boor Ralph Holcombe lest she should be forced to resume her dreary dependency at Downham Hall, it was not likely she should long resist the importunities of a handsome young peer of the realm.

She had actually given her consent. Lady Mary, who insisted upon presenting her trousseau, had despatched to town her confidential orders. The eventful day was fixed—the special license procured; and when, one day, the generous aunt presented to her future daughter-in law the magnificent set of family diamonds which Lord Glastonbury's partiality had at Hartingham's birth bestowed upon herself, the enraptured Helen, while surveying herself in the glass adorned with that matchless tiara and dazzling necklace, admitted that she was the luckiest person in the world!

CHAPTER XIII.

The appointed day arrived, and they were married. The solemn vow was pronounced, to which seldom had bride and bridegroom lent a more careless ear. The little Hartley girls attended as bridesmaids. Lady Mary held as large a salts'-bottle in her hand as became her double capacity of aunt and mother-in-law; and the Colonel, who had primed himself with a tumbler of sherry, looked as hazy by daylight as he was in the habit of looking after dinner.

At the close of the ceremony, Lord Hartingham conducted his beautiful wife into their grandfather's apartment to receive his benediction, his own deportment exhibiting more feeling than might have been expected of him. For the affection borne him by the old Earl from the moment of his birth had begotten something nearly resembling affection in return; and Lord Glastonbury having always expressed a wish that he might marry young and give him great grandchildren to spoil, Lord Hartingham rejoiced that, in bringing to his aged feet so lovely a bride, he was also gratifying his pride in the child of his lost daughter.

"God bless you, my dear Emily!" faltered the poor old man, as soon as he could be made to understand the motive of the white satin and lace veil. "Make our dear Hart. as happy as he deserves, and be a happier woman than your mother."

To escape from neighborly gossip and congratulations, the Hartinghams were to start for a short bridal tour among the neighboring lakes previous to repairing with the family to town.

It was from the first station of their route, that, on the day succeeding her hasty marriage, Helen addressed a letter to Lady Downham,—probably as the member of the family of whose principles she stood least in awe: requesting her to communicate to her father that she had judged it unnecessary to harass him by a request for his consent to a measure he might not wholly approve, at a time when his hands were full of business; and appealing to Lady Downham's good sense to admit that it was an act of kindness towards them both, to relieve him of an additional burthen. She also begged,—and her hand trembled a little in beginning the sentence,—that Blanche might be apprized of her change of name. "I should have written to her myself," continued the bride of Hart., "but that, as there was, at one time, a little liking on her part towards my cousin, she may feel less satisfied at his selecting me for his wife, than if he had chosen a stranger. If, however, as I hope and believe, our happiness is dear to her, she will very soon let me learn in her own handwriting, that she is the same dear kind sister as before."

Having despatched this specious epistle, she proceeded to enjoy without a drawback her row upon a lake, glassy as a mirror, reflecting in its steely depths the aged mountains revivified by the touch of spring, in which it lay embosomed; carefully enveloped in her fleecy cashmere by the hand of the assiduous bridegroom, under shelter of the white awning of the boat which appeared to be transporting two souls in bliss towards the Elysian plains. Both of them were supremely—both of them *shameful'y* happy!—

Colonel Hartley, meanwhile, had undertaken the task of communicating to Sir George in his peculiar, dare-devil, offhand style, the event which had taken place. "A couple of giddy young folks, a plaguy deal too much in love to care for new carriages or marriage-settlements, having determined to marry, he had thought it best to prevent the scandal of a runaway match, by allowing it to be solemnized under Lord Glastonbury's roof. And as Lord and Lady Hartingham expected no pecuniary aid from Sir George, beyond the half of her mother's fortune, to which, being of age, she was entitled, *he* could have no grounds for dissatisfaction at an alliance which rendered her the representative of one of the oldest peerages extant." Such were the staple arguments of his letter. They were overlauded by very few compliments. The notorious antipathy which had always subsisted between Tom Hartley and his brother-in-law, would have rendered them too glaringly flagitious.

But if the Colonel and Lady Mary waited without anxiety for a reply to their communication, (to the tenor of which they were indifferent, since it could in no way affect the material interests of Lady Hartingham,) it was not so with Helen. Though conscious that she had already established a degree of influence over the weak mind of her husband, such as Lord Efferville's obstinacy of temper and superiority of years would, in his case, never have allowed her to attain, she stood a little in awe of the fairer side of his nature. She was afraid that when the embarrassments of Downham Hall came to be thoroughly known, he would feel that he ought to have been forwarned.

With some anxiety, therefore, did she extend her hand to receive from those of her superfine lady-in-waiting, Mrs. Walmsley, a letter bearing the Downham post-mark, re-directed from Glastonbury Castle, which reached her some days afterwards; and thankful was she that her dear Hart., on catching a glimpse of Blanche's handwriting, had the delicacy to leave the room.

"It was not an answer to my letter," said she, by way of explanation, when again they met. "As yet, my father knows nothing of our marriage. It would not surprise me, if amidst the confusion arising from his unlucky railroad speculations, he took very little interest in the matter."

For the moment, Lord Hartingham felt relieved. A hater of scenes, he cared not to what he might be indebted for release from the explosion of Sir George Downham's wrath.

But the letter, which she did not judge necessary to confide to her husband, need not be withheld from our readers.

"*Doesbury Lodge, April* 23.

"Oh! how rejoiced I am, my dearest dear sister," wrote the unsuspecting Blanche, "that

you have been spared the sight and even the thought of all that has been passing here! I would endeavor to keep it from you, Helen; but you would learn it, perhaps, from common report, and must not be unprepared for the blow. Grievous things have been passing at Downham. My father has been absent these ten days; to keep out of the way, it is thought, of the bailiffs:—for Lady Downham, who usually accompanies him on his journey to town, remained behind with myself and Lou. Some days after his disappearance, what is called an execution was put into the house; and from what I could learn from the servants, (who were so much shocked and frightened, that one and all signified their wish to leave the moment they could obtain payment of their wages,) a writ for some thousands of pounds has been issued against my father, which the furniture at Downham must be sold to pay off. This is the more humiliating, that the place was just let for a year to Lord Efferville; his wife, who finds the air of their own place disagree with her, being desirous to settle in her native county. And now, to Lady Downham's great concern, the agreement becomes invalid!

"Nothing can exceed the kindness with which Mrs. Watts and her ever-friendly husband have behaved on this occasion. At the arrival of the sheriff's officers poor Lou. was suffering from an attack of nervous fever; and Barker, who was in attendance, entreated that no hint of what was passing should reach her ears, since the least agitation might bring on a fatal acceleration. Of course I promised to do my best: Lady Downham being engrossed with lawyers, inventories, and disagreeable business of every description. But in the evening came Mrs. Watts, to carry us both away with her to the lodge; having set off on her kind expedition, the moment she learned from Barker the danger to which our poor little sufferer might be exposed. But for *that* risk, you will readily believe that I would rather have remained to afford what assistance and comfort to Lady Downham was in my power. When she owned to me, however, that it would be a relief to her to have us away at such a moment, I gladly accepted Mrs. Watts' humane proposal; and with the few things they would permit us to take out of the house, we are here, till the sale shall have taken place so as to pay off all immediate claims and enable my poor father to form plans for the future. Everybody, even Mr. Watts, (so apt to find fault with the way in which other people manage their affairs,) admits that he has been at least as unlucky as imprudent. He has also hinted to me that this sudden taste for speculation was entirely the work of Lady Downham, who was discontented with the provision the strict entail of my father's property enabled him to make for her in the event of his death.

"And now, dearest Helen, I must tell you what I consider our sole consolation in this most miserable affair. I am assured by our friends here, that the object of my father's absence is to dispose of his life-interest in the Downham estate, which was so tied up in our favor by my grandfather's will, that it can never be sold. Pray consult Colonel Hartley, (for Mr. Watts will not listen to a word on the subject,) whether we could not by the renunciation of our future claims, enable him to dispose of some portion of the estate; that he may continue to reside for the remainder of his days in the family mansion of which he used to be so fond.

"Should this be legally impossible, dear Helen, the consolation to which I before alluded, remains. If (as Probyn Watts has heard from London, from his son John,) my father has engaged his rights to the last farthing, to be swallowed up in the bubble companies and the demands of unscrupulous attorneys, all he will have to depend upon for the means of existence, will be the interest of my mother's fortune;—to which, it appears, we are entitled on coming of age. Till now, I never guessed what happiness the possession of money could afford! For though fifteen hundred a-year will not ensure the luxuries and comforts to which he is accustomed, or replace the honorable position which Lady Downham's avarice has induced him to sacrifice, it will at least bestow competence and ease; and above all, a shelter and fitting attendance on the darling child whose wistful eyes are watching me as I write; little surmising, poor dear, how deeply her happiness, and even life, is involved in every line!—

"What I wish, therefore, Helen, is that you would write to my poor father a letter, which Lady Downham, to whom I can remit it, will manage to forward, making him an offer of the sum in question,—of your share of which, it seems, you have already the command; and telling him that mine, next year, will be equally at his disposal. I would write myself; but he always loved you best, and will be better pleased with the concession as coming wholly from you. I trust he will be more at his ease when satisfied that this property will remain his own.

"And now, dearest, farewell. Let me hear from you soon,—*very* soon; for you will easily conceive how much I stand in need of comfort. Tell my cousin, if he should feel uneasy about me in this emergency, that neither my strength nor courage has given away; and that I think of him with the utmost affection. If he has forgotten me,—for such things happen,—I rely upon you, dearest sister, not to mention my name.

"Your own affectionate, but afflicted
"BLANCHE."

It is not to be supposed that such a letter could be perused with indifference, even by the least affectionate of sisters. But after the lapse of an hour, the prevailing sentiment of Lady Hartingham's mind was embarrassment. She knew not how to prelude to her husband the tale of her father's disgrace; she knew not how to announce to her sister that half the maintenance on which she depended for his solace, and all the attachment on which she relied for her own, were lost to her for ever. Luckily, the recollection of her explanatory epistle to Lady Downham satisfied her that in the interim, poor Blanche's illusions must

have been dispelled; so that it would be better to wait for some further communication from Downham Hall, before she hazarded a reply.

The immediate dilemma arose from the difficulty of enlightening Lord Hartingham's mind as to the confusion of her family affairs, without allowing the cloven foot of her duplicity to peep out. Though but one week a wife, she dreaded the *tete-a-tete* drive which was to convey them from their last lake lounge to the inn at Penrith, where they were to dine and sleep, previous to their return, the following day, to Glastonbury Castle.

Her satisfaction, therefore, was almost equal to her surprise when, on driving up to the inn, it turned out that the chariot whose smoking posters were in the act of being changed in the yard, contained Sir Horace Lumley and Lord John Ferguson, on their way back from Scotland to town, for the meeting of Parliament after the Easter recess. Instead of the bridal blushes, which might have been expected of her at this sudden encounter, instead of sympathy in her dear Hart's exclamation on catching sight of them, of "confound those fellows! what a bore," she allowed herself to be congratulated, and led up into the drawing-room bespoken for her, conscious of no other feeling than relief at having her own and Hartingham's attention diverted from home.

To an inquiry as to whence he came and whither he was going, Sir Horace replied, "To London, of course; though less speedily, perhaps, than I expected ten minutes ago, for as we came in, I heard Hart. endeavoring to persuade Ferguson to dine and sleep here; and our horses, I perceive, are taken back to the stable. I conclude, therefore, that the most strong-minded of men, as Fergy calls himself when gingered up for one of his show-offs in the House, has yielded to the first broadside."

"It is very kind of him to derange his plans for our sake," was Helen's polite reply.

But politeness was thrown away on an egotist like Lumley.

"Nay—our plans had been only just forced on our adoption," said he. We started this morning, intending to dine and sleep at Lowther Castle; and only discovered here, ten minutes before your arrival, that Lonsdale was already off for town, which determined us to proceed. But the pleasure of your society, my dear Lady Hartingham, will naturally reconcile us to the deficiencies of the place. Though the port will of course be thick, and the claret thin, we shall 'look in your face till we forget it all.'"

He did *not* forget it, however, or rather took care that the waiters and host should remember it for some time to come; and Helen was not a little amused at finding how peevish even a well-bred man may become, if discontented with the complexion of the lemon that flavors his salmon. He was indignant indeed that a country inn should adopt such a substitute for the cucumber which Covent Garden will always furnish, before Easter, for the modicum of half-a-guinea; and he afforded the only proof in his power, that the disgust he expressed towards the wine was genuine, by refusing to drink it, and asking for iced water, which, of course, was not to be had.

It was not easy to reconcile the supercilious *gourmet* to such a series of disappointments. Yet some comfort arose from knowing he should be the first to recount at White's, on the morrow, how he "had stumbled on that boy of Hartley's in his bridal tour; and that Lord and Lady Hartingham made as handsome a pair as ever ran together in harness."

"By the way, Hart.," said Lord John Ferguson, "have you heard that Stokesleigh is coming to England? Yes, by Jove! he will be in town in May. He wrote to me t'other day to take him rooms at Mivart's or Fenton's, as soon as there was enough daylight at five o'clock (P. M. of course) for a man to see to shave."

"And what brings him to London?" inquired Hart., whose hilarity did not seem increased by the news.

"How can I guess? Caprice, probably, the breeze that governs most of his cruises."

"Not know what brings Lord Stokesleigh over?" said Lumley interrupting him. "Why to see how matrimony agrees with our friend Hart.! Stokesleigh is always fidgeting about matrimony, its causes and effects. He knows he ought to marry. With such a title as his predestined to extinction, and such a fortune, to go to a hundredth cousin, it is as incumbent on *him* as on the master of a preparatory school. But he dares not. He has seen such examples in his own family and other people's, nay, feels perhaps, that there is such a weight of retribution in store for his married head, that he stands on the brink of matrimony as people do on the steps of a bathing-machine, without courage for the plunge."

"I must give my friend Stokesleigh some good advice," said Lord Hartingham, trying to look a few years older than his age.

"You *owe* him some," retorted Ferguson, "if you go on the system of returning good for evil; for they say he gave *you* a proper lot of *bad*, Hart., when you were with him in Paris. They used to call him your Professor of Immoral Philosophy."

"He certainly did somewhat to justify the *sobriquet!*" replied Hartingham, coolly.

Helen listened attentively. The name of Lord Stokesleigh was new to her. But she saw it was one of which it did not become her to appear ignorant; and she had tact enough to stifle her curiosity.

"*I'm* glad he's coming!" added Ferguson. "Stokesleigh is so original, so quaint, so unlike other people. He's as dry as dry Champagne. I am sure," added he, with unconscious incivility, "I wish he were here at this moment!"

"And so do I, if it were only to make up a rubber!" echoed Lumley, with the slight stretch of a suppressed yawn.

"If you consent to put up with my bad playing, I shall be delighted to do my best to replace him," said Lady Hartingham: an offer gratefully accepted, for Lumley and Ferguson were men who looked upon eating, drinking and dealing, as the great business of life; and

a day finished without Whist, as much lost as the day of Titus.

But if they had failed on the present occasion in the discharge of the two former duties, they had no fault to find with their rubber. Well trained by Colonel Hartley, Helen played a more than tolerable game. They spoke highly, therefore, of her in town, the following day. Everybody knew her to be a beautiful girl. But they had now to learn that she possessed other attractions. Her moral merits would render her an addition to their society. She was fond enough of whist, to play till two in the morning; and had won three rubbers without a revoke or a squabble!

While thus applauded by those whose praise was fashion, and to whose favorable verdict, her husband affixed inordinate value, Lady Hartingham was proceeding back with a heavy heart towards Glastonbury Castle. She had not yet found courage or opportunity for an explanation with Hart.; and knew that all must transpire on their reaching home. The Holcombes, having heard the worst from their cousins at Doesbury Lodge, would doubtless have lost no time in condoling triumphantly with Lady Mary.

"Why are you so sad, dearest Helen?" inquired her husband, as they came in sight of the turrets of Glastonbury. "Are you afraid of finding an unkind letter from Downham Hall? Fear nothing, fear nothing, my darling girl! 'hard words, you know, break no bones,' as I used to tell myself, when, at Eaton, my governor had been slanging me. The worst the old folks can do, is to refuse to see us. We must do our best to survive it!"

By this, Helen was satisfied that as yet, he knew nothing; and by Lady Mary's really affectionate greeting and ready information that the Colonel had not received a word of answer to his letter, she was satisfied for a time. She even ventured to inquire after the Holcombes.

"Lady Mary had probably been pestered to death by inquisitive visitors?"

"No, my dear," rejoined her aunt, "I took good care of my own interests on that score! Not choosing to put my stupid country neighbors *au fait* to the state of the case, I have not been 'at home' a single day since you left us. One morning, on catching a glimpse of the Holcombe liveries coming up the avenue, I doubled the guard and *consigne:* and we need have no further fear, Helen, of seeing them till next season. The Colonel is anxious to get to town; and if you have no objection, we think of starting to-morrow."

So far from having an objection, the arrangement was just what Lady Hartingham desired. She knew enough of the influence of the crush of London life upon people's feelings, to be aware that, whatever shock the discovery of her father's ruin might create, would not be half so much felt in town, as in the isolation of Glastonbury Castle. For even betwixt those who live closest to each other in London life, there is always an intervening space. Husband and wife, parent and child, do not feel together, as in the country. A sort of negative attraction keeps their souls asunder.

CHAPTER XIV.

So far from bearing in mind that money was the one thing wanting on all sides, Lady Mary had catered as liberally for the comfort of her new daughter-in-law, as though already in possession of the fortune lying in such distant perspective. All the fantastic products of modern luxury were united in the suite of rooms dedicated to the use of Lord and Lady Hartingham in St. James's Square; to complete which, Lady Mary cheerfully ceded the ornamental dressing-room in which she had so long delighted.

To this gorgeous spot was Helen welcomed, as became the bride of the only son of parents so foolish, and——— the unsuspecting heiress of eight thousand a-year.

It had been long arranged, that the bridegroom was to be presented by his father at the first levee, the bride by her mother-in-law, at the first drawing-room; in hopes of securing access to the earliest royal fetes of the season. And to these publicities, Lady Hartingham looked forward with all the eagerness which a suit of the finest diamonds inspires in a heart fluttering with vanity, and a head turned by worldliness; interrupted only by an occasional pang, more of annoyance than of tenderness, when she thought of her family troubles.

It was on the day preceding the drawing-room, which occurred in less than a week after their arrival in town, and Lady Hartingham's presentation dress and train, as elegant as white fuchsias and Madame Devy could make them, were lying in her dressing-room for inspection; when she was startled, as by a spectre, by the sight of Blanche's handwriting!

It required as much nerve to open the letter as to look down from the apex of the Great Pyramid! Yet, when read, how little was there to wound or intimidate.

"Lady Downham has given me your message, my dear sister. That you may be happy, is my earnest prayer and hope; and may it forward this to learn that we are all in good health, and that our prospects are daily brightening. I will write again, dear Helen, as soon as I can command a long half-hour, and perfect composure.

"Your ever attached

"BLANCHE."

The mild mercy of this letter was lost upon the recipient. But it was "highly satisfactory that dear Blanche took matters so coolly: that she was disposed to make no fuss, and refrain from missish upbraidings. Above all, Lady Hartingham was delighted that it was just such a letter as she could exhibit to the family, compromising no one, and entailing no disagreeable explanations.

"I have had a letter from Blanche," said she, holding it out to her husband.

But Lord Hartingham, shrinking from the sight of the handwriting and the reproaches, open or tacit, he did not doubt it must contain, replied, "No, no, Nell! Don't let us begin the foolish habit of reading each other's letters! Occasions occur when it is inconvenient, and then people grow suspicious, which leads to quarrels."

"Let me read it to you, then," replied his wife. "For though I admit it to be a system which cannot be carried out without treachery to one's correspondents, I should like you to know how readily Blanche has reconciled herself to our marriage."

Lord Hartingham listened, as he was desired; and then dismissed the subject by some common-place praise of her sister's good sense and good temper. He did not think it necessary to add, that he had received, by the same post, a certain turquoise ring, inclosed in a blank cover, which he had approached the fire-place in his dressing-room with the intention of putting out of sight for ever; and only locked up in his dressing-box because, the morning being a warm May morning, no fire had been kindled.

Helen was in the highest spirits; her sister's letter afforded hope that her father's affairs would be satisfactorily wound up, and she was looking forward to the morrow's ceremonial with all the intoxicated vanity of a first triumph over the quiet unassuming little Lady Efferville, who was also to be presented as a bride, and did not reach up to her shoulder. Too completely absorbed was she in her selfish pride to sympathize with her dear Hart's ill-humor when at eight o-clock, their usual dinner-hour, Colonel Hartley did not make his appearance; he who, even when a morning rubber interfered, was never known to keep them waiting.

But before any of them had time, however, to preach patience, the Colonel was in the room; not, as usual, in his evening coat and well-varnished boots; but without having so much as paused in the hall to lay aside the paletot and umbrella with which he had walked home from St. James's street.

"Where on earth have you been, my dear?" said Lady Mary, with less than her usual languor, on perceiving her dear Tom to be unusually excited.

"At White's."

"Which means at whist?"

"Not I. I've been talking for the last hour with Harry Knox, who's been down Norfolk for the recess."

"And who might surely have told you what sort of a breeding season it has been, in less than an hour!" drawled Lady Mary, who seemed to estimate at a low rate Lord Harry's powers of conversation.

"I never so much as asked him about the birds. He was full of a story that took my breath away. Knox swears that Downham's a ruined man, and that the Duke of Warton has bought his estates!"

"Absurd!" cried Lady Mary, far more intent upon her dinner than upon club reports.

"It is easily to say *absurd!*" he angrily retorted; "but all I can tell you is, that when changing horses at woodbridge, Knox fell in Savory the upholsterer, who was actually going down to the Hall to make an estimate for the furniture."

"But it *is* completely furnished; so that story falls to the ground!" said Lady Mary, rousing herself up, while Helen preserved a horrified silence.

"It *was* completely furnished. But there's been an execution in the house; and all is sold up, to the last chair and table. Efferville, on whose account the purchase was made by the Duke, and who is going to reside there this very summer, will have everything to put in."

"Did you ever hear anything more completely *outre* than all this, my dear Helen?" drawled Lady Mary, a little ashamed that the Colonel should blurt out his idle scandals in presence of Lady Hartingham.

"More grievous than ridiculous, I fear," replied Lady Hartingham, endeavoring to retain her composure, though every pulse in her veins was throbbing. "Remember, my dear aunt, how often I have told you that Lady Downham had induced my father to enter into all sorts of foolish speculations!"

"Yes, I am afraid he has been imprudent," rejoined Lady Mary. "But as to the tale of the estates, *that*, happily, is quite out of the question; for, by Sir Jeremiah Downham's will, failing issue male, they are strictly entailed upon yourself."

"Come, come! there's some comfort yet!" cried the frank Tom Hartley, rallying. "But are you sure of all this, Mary?"

"*Perfectly* sure! A Mr. Watts, a man who married a cousin of the Holcombes, was witness to the will, and Harman the banker is one of the trustees."

Poor Helen! amidst all her dismay, what a stroke to her vanity! To learn at once that she was an heiress, and have reason to suspect that her hand had been sought, as such, not only by the son of the worldly-wise Lady Mary, but by the seeming-simple Ralph of Holcombe Manor!

But the information thus incidentally afforded was working a great revolution in her breast. She was taking courage. A biter bit, she thought, was half justified in having bitten!

"The whole affair seems involved in mystery," observed Lord Hartingham, coldly, already mentally accusing his mother of duplicity in not having placed his cousin's position clearly before him.

"Not in the slightest degree, as regards the sale of the estate," rejoined Lady Hartingham, resenting his seeming indifference by an air almost of *hauteur*. "It is only my father's interest in the property that has been disposed of. Lord Efferville has simply purchased the right of living at Downham during his life-time."

"You *knew* of it, then?"—inquired her husband, mechanically rising from her side, and placing himself on the hearth-rug,—"Then why never mention it to *me?*"

"For the same reason, probably, which

deterred your mother from mentioning to *me* that I was heiress of eight thousand a-year," retorted Helen; "the disagreeableness of all allusions to money matters between near relations!"

"Still, had I known that Sir George Downham was in a state of such pecuniary distress—"

"You would have hesitated to make his daughter your wife!" interrupted Helen, with some acrimony. "Do not be uneasy. I have still the enjoyment of nearly eight hundred a-year; and as many thousands, Lady Mary tells me, in prospect."

"Had you listened to an end, Nell," rejoined her young husband, with more temper than might have been expected of him, "you would have heard me say that, at a moment of family distress, I should have thought twice before I aggravated Sir George's mortifications by defying his parental authority."

"The best thing we can do just now," interrupted Lady Mary, "is to postpone these unpleasant discussions, which will bear keeping, though dinner will not.—Ring the bell, Hart., dear!—By the time the soup is on table, your father will be ready."

Though Lord Hartingham gave his arm as usual to his wife to lead her down to dinner, he did it with a feeling he had never expected to entertain towards that beautiful being whom, but a fortnight before, he had worshipped as angelic. His best efforts were unable to repress the conviction which had suddenly started into his mind that, situated as Helen was situated, his cousin Blanche would not have concealed a single circumstance of her family-affairs from the husband of her choice; that, situated as Sir George Downham was situated, his cousin Blanche would have quitted even the man to whom she was about to pledge her faith for ever, and cleave to her ruined father. He knew he had no further right to think of his cousin Blanche, or trouble himself with surmises about her feelings or actions. But between the sight of her ring and handwriting that morning, and the discovery of his wife's disingenuousness and bitterness that evening, the reminiscence was not to be checked. He was forced to swallow two consecutive glasses of sherry before he could recover sufficient *sang-froid* to talk about indifferent things.

When he did manage to open the conversation, he saw from the forced calmness of Helen's manner, that the spot which burned on either cheek was the result of an inward struggle. Her resolution was indeed taken. Strong in the consciousness of the fortune awaiting her, which no temporary eclipse of her family consequence could affect, she would submit neither to slights, nor reproaches. The rank she had received from her husband she would uphold with all the force of her own character; and the inheritance which neither father nor stepmother, nor parents-in-law, could take away, should serve her for shield and buckler.

The only thing that caused her courage to waver was when the Colonel, who had been shocked into some degree of sense and sobriety, observed (as soon as the servants had withdrawn after dinner) that, under all the circumstances, he thought they could hardly appear at the drawing-room on the morrow.

"What nonsense!" cried Lady Mary. "The only false step we could take would be to give the world reason to suppose this *contretemps* took us by surprise. You were much to blame, Hartley, to let Lord Harry discover you were in the dark."

The oath that escaped Colonel Hartley's lips, it is needless to repeat. The speech it served to garnish purported that he was not quite enough of a Talleyrand to preserve a face of unconcern while hearing that his brother-in-law—his dear Helen's father—was driven out of house and home, in his old age, with scarce a shilling to bless himself withal.

A moment afterwards, Hartingham asked his father to take wine with him. Had he followed the impulses of his heart, he would have stretched out his arm and given his hand a hearty shake.

Lady Mary meanwhile returned blindly to the charge.

"I am still of opinion," said she, "that the surest way to prevent the discussion of this unlucky business in the world, is for us to appear there as usual.—Had Sir George Downham committed any dishonorable action, his relations would naturally have shrunk from showing their faces. But in these times, *who* has not speculated unwisely?—When does a day pass without some family or other breaking up their establishment and going abroad,—which is only another form of what has occurred at Downham Hall,—without causing the smallest outcry?—On the contrary, I think our dear Helen ought to be seen. It will lessen the impression that her father's ruin is irretrievable; and serve to show the world that she, at least, is safe from the wreck."

But though Lady Hartingham's vanity was not defrauded of its promised triumph, nothing could remove the bitter drop which had fallen into her sparkling cup. Though conscious of being the most beautiful woman at the drawing-room, and generally so admitted,—though blazing in family diamonds that imparted new charms to her resplendent face, while poor pale timid Lady Efferville borrowed little lustre from her simple pearl necklace and white tarlatane,—whenever she saw people whispering together after glancing towards her, instead of supposing, according to her wont, that they were deciding her lace to be the richest, and her shoulders the whitest in the room, she kept fancying they were discussing the execution at Downham Hall, and opining how far her own fortune was involved. She returned from the drawing-room, not only tired, but dispirited,—or as the Colonel would have called it, dashed and cowed. She could scarcely forbear bursting into tears on her return to her dressing-room.

She was too unhappy even to congratulate herself on having caused her faithless Viscount's color to rise by inquiring whether the short lady in the Irish poplin train was Lady Efferville,—or on having outshone her former rival, as Nora in white dimity is outshone by Tilburina; and would far rather have laid her head upon

her pillow, and shut out for a few hours all recollection of the brilliant throng, than have had to accompany Lady Mary into the Park;—nominally, for the refreshment of a little fresh air; but literally, for a second exhibition of her charms.

There was an air of impertinent patronage in the manner in which Sir Horace Lumley kissed his hand from the recess of his cabriolet, as he passed her in the ring, which caused her own finger tips to tingle!

But the grave stern manner in which the Duke of Dumfries lifted his hat to her, a moment afterwards, while escorting his daughters, Lady Augusta and Lady Marian, to the ride, affected her still more painfully. His Grace's manner of contemplating her was that of a grey-haired father, able to enter into the full heinousness of the ingratitude of a thankless child!—

CHAPTER XV.

Many months had elapsed since Helen's marriage; so many, that the rose-trees, whose green leaves were not then budding, had bloomed and shed their flowers, and were now shedding their leaves, turned yellow with frost, or streaked with scarlet by the autumn sun. The glory of the year was gone. Now and then, a misty, chilly day, reminded one that winter was at hand; and that the seaside, so pleasant at midsummer, when the sparkling waves come hissing over the sands, diffusing freshness and health, is a dreary place when the angry billows become crested with foam, and the raging wind repels all approach to the shore.

And it was by the seaside that, according to their first project, the Downhams were established. It was around their dwelling that the tempestuous breezes swept shriekingly and threateningly during the long nights, while throughout the sunless days, the surges kept up their monotonous growl. A cottage at Southwold, some twenty miles from Doesbury, had been provided for Louisa during the bathing season, by the provident care of Pro. Watts and his wife; and when Sir George rejoined the family, finding the terms moderate and the seclusion complete, he turned a deaf ear to his wife's entreaties that they should submit to their vexations and retrenchments on the continent, and settled at once on the English coast.

Lady Downham had, in fact, ceased to be an oracle with him. Her injudicious counsel had betrayed him into all his difficulties; and now he took pleasure in thwarting the woman, whose avarice, engrafted on his own sympathetic nature, had brought forth such evil fruit.

Unsustained by a single affection, Lady Downham, on the other hand, suffered far more than himself. If indifferent to the downfall of his house, hard was it to abide the disappointment of that greedy, grasping avidity, which had gloated by anticipation on the possession of the gold after which she had wasted her girlhood in sighing—which she had bartered her youth to secure—and all hope of which had now vanished for ever. The certainty that she was to be poor for life—that Martha Pomeroy had sacrificed herself in vain, and Lady Downham flung away the meat in her mouth, to snatch at the shadow—had subtracted twenty years from her life. Though little more than three-and-thirty, she was an old woman; her head grey, her face shrivelled, her countenance haggard. Her sole satisfaction seemed to lie in reviling the name of Helen; and the exercise of a petty and tyrannous thrift, rendering every one about her as uncomfortable as her care-crazed self.

It is therefore little to be wondered at, that, when the stormy days of Sir George's probation subsided—when all was sold and all was paid—when even the most rapacious of the attorneys who had preyed upon his weakness, were settled with to the utmost farthing of their costs, so that nothing remained of the liberal sum paid by the Duke of Warton for Lord Efferville, but three thousand pounds, (less than half his annual income, to maintain himself and his family for life!) it should afford him a degree of comfort past the expression of language, to find two of his three children dutiful and tender as before. That Blanche should have hastened to devote to the use of the united family the moiety of her mother's fortune, of which her sister had already claimed and received the other half, surprised no one, not even the money-loving Lady Downham, who could scarcely bear that a half-crown piece should slip through her fingers. But there is a generosity of mind far greater than generosity of the purse; and the nobleness with which she endeavored to make his misfortunes sit easy upon her father—persuading him to regard his poverty as a calamity rather than a fault, and above all, endeavoring to satisfy him, by her cheerfulness, that she was as happy as ever—had the effect of softening even *his* callous heart.

Not that even Sir George suspected his poor daughter of repressing any other sorrow than a young girl's regrets for a brilliant position in life; balls, concerts, operas, dress, equipage, admiration—all that his indulgence had allowed Helen to enjoy, and of which Helen had secured the permanent enjoyment. Her ready submission to his desire that her sister's name should never be uttered in his presence, suggested no idea of the painful sentiments with which that name was connected.

But for Lady Downham's constant recurrence to the hardness of their fate, and infliction of mean exactions upon the servants, they might have lived in ease and competence in that cheap seclusion, on their income of a thousand a-year.

Still, Blanche (who, the money being her own, had the most right to murmur against her stepmother's meanness,) never breathed a discontented word. The only point on which she was ever known to insist was, that Louisa's comforts should not be curtailed; that the sick girl should enjoy every alleviation their means could secure. She had hitherto contrived that

Louisa should be kept in ignorance of the full extent of their misfortunes. The invalid still fancied it was only a temporary pressure and the hardness of the times, which caused Downham Hall to be let; and that they were residing by the sea-side for her sake. That the governess and nurse had been dismissed because Blanche was anxious to supersede them in their functions, was only an additional proof of the devotedness of that angelic sister, by whom no wish she ever expressed was long left unfulfilled.

"I protest to mercy," cried Pro. Watts, who had driven over one day from Doesbury Lodge to look after his *protegees*, (his familiarity being, by the way, one of the sorest trials the reserved baronet had now to abide,) "I protest you all look twenty times happier here than you used at Downham! Fine and stately as you might make it, that place was always about as cheerful as the county jail!"

"You find us looking happier here, my dear Mr. Watts," said Blanche, perceiving that her father was too absent for reply, "because you find us all *together*—seldom the case in great houses!"

"Not *all* together," muttered the 'squire, significantly, but his mutterings were not intended for the reporters' gallery.

"And, above all, you find dear Lou. growing quite robust," added Blanche, glancing at the now blooming face of her poor little sister, of whose spinal malady, strengthened as she was by the sea-breezes, only deformity remained. "We may thank *you*, our kind, good friend, for that, as well as for a thousand other services. Had you not settled us at Southwold previous to papa's arrival, he would never have been made to believe how much of comfort and convenience could be comprised within these narrow walls."

"I should have found comfort under any roof, my dear child, which you undertook to make my home," interposed her father, suddenly rousing himself, on hearing an allusion to his name.

"Still," rejoined Pro. Watts, "when you first settled here, I own I was somewhat afraid you might be moped to death in a mere village, without occupation or interest of any kind—after such a stirring life as you had been leading at the Hall—farms to ride over, trespassers to prosecute, bailiffs to blow up, and churchwardens to keep down!"

"A most inviting picture, truly!" exclaimed Blanche, unable to resist a smile at his notion of a country gentleman's delights.

"Well, my dear—lightly as you may think of such duties, they take up time and attention, I promise you. And it puzzled me to guess how poor Downham would fill up the time thrown upon his hands—with nothing in the wide world to amuse him, except to spell over yesterday's *Times*, or saunter on the sands with Lou. upon her crutches, picking up amber and jet!"

"After such vicissitudes as I have experienced," said Sir George, gravely, "the mode of life that recalls least of the past, is always the most acceptable. Nothing here reminds me of Downhall Hall or Curzon Street; nothing brings before me my past follies and temptations; and there is consequently room for the growth of new enjoyments. For instance," added he, with a faint smile, "I have had leisure here to make acquaintance with my children!"

And with very genuine smiles did the two girls thank him for the avowal.

"Out of good, you see, comes evil," resumed Sir George, trying to be sociable. "I need not tell so good a gardener as yourself, Watts," he continued, glancing at the fine flowers forwarded from the Lodge, "that our fairest roses are grafted on a thorn. The desertion of my eldest daughter enabled me to appreciate the worth of the two remaining."

A deep blush suffused the usually pale face of Blanche. She was sorry to hear her father break, by his unkind allusion, his rule concerning the non-mention of her sister's name.

"You mistake me, child," added Sir George, replying to this sudden change of a countenance, every light and shade of which he was beginning to understand. "The blame I would imply, attaches less to Helen than to myself. When first I heard that, her prospects of fortune having tempted a spendthrift lord to make her his wife, she had not considered her father's consent to the match worth asking for, I was enraged—I was disgusted—I am not sure but that in my heart I cursed her—as the origin of the first insult which my altered fortunes had brought upon my head."

"And well you might," cried Pro. Watts, with more emphasis than discretion. "If my son Jack were to set *my* authority at nought in the same way, by Jove, I'd pitch him to the devil, and leave my money to the nearest hospital!——"

"Better forgive him, and leave it to him and his children," interposed Blanche, cheerfully, afraid that the conversation was taking an untoward direction.

"You might be justified in *your* displeasure," resumed Sir George Downham, turning gravely but not severely on his guest; "for you have been the best of fathers; but I, when my first ebullition of rage subsided, could not but ask myself what I had done to deserve love or duty at the hands of my children? what tenderness I had shown them? what sacrifice made to their welfare?"

"The commandment to love and honor our parents is unconditional," said Blanche in a low voice; for while eager for her father's exoneration, she felt that she was condemning her sister.

"Because," rejoined Sir George, "hard-heartedness in a parent was inconceivable to the great framer of the law! The love of a father 'pitying his own children' is even made a standard of comparison for the warmest excess of human kindness. And having been forced to admit that my daughter Helen's contemptuous usage was, if not justifiable, easy to account for, I could do no less," continued he, more cheerfully, "than add reformation to penitence; and promise myself that if either of the others failed in duty, they should be excusable through no want of affection on my part."

It was impossible for Blanche not to rise and imprint a kiss upon the brow, from which of late, the white hairs had rapidly vanished. But when he saw the tears of poor Lou. fast falling over her work, he took pity on the poor little crutch, and going towards her, pressed her fondly to his heart.

"And thus it is, Watts," said he, trying to recover his composure, "that you find us happier than we were in those buckram days, when molten metal seemed to be running in my veins instead of the warmer current of nature."

Pro. Watts did not hear the allusion. He was gazing out of the window upon the Portugal laurels fringing the little lawn, and buffeted by the sea breezes; in order that they might not see him wiping his eyes at the touching humility of his once stony-hearted neighbor. When he turned back towards the work-table, he grumbled something about the worship of the golden calf being now-a-days as demoralizing an idolatry as even in Aaron's time. Then, as if determined to profit by Sir George's having broken the ice by mention of his eldest daughter's name, he suddenly inquired of Blanche, whether she heard often from the Hartinghams.

"As often as one of my letters to Helen brings back an answer," she replied, with an embarrassed air, as if to take upon herself the responsibility of any coolness between them.

"But have you heard lately?"

"Not very lately," she replied,—half afraid there might be bad news in store.

"Then I can tell you a great deal about her!" replied Pro.; and Blanche and Lou. considered it a good omen that their father never checked the communication, nor quitted the room. "We've exchanged visits, of course, with that pretty modest little Lady Efferville, your tenant at the Hall,"—added he,—aware that such was the light in which the Effervilles were regarded by Louisa; "and it was impossible, you know, to avoid some allusion to those who had preceded and were to succeed them at the place.

"And I was pleased to find the young Viscountess express a deep interest in Lady Hartingham, who, if the world says true, was as near as might be cutting her out of her coronet.

"But to that, of course, I made no allusion,—nor she neither. *She* spoke of Lady Hartingham, only as the belle of the London season; courted by every body; playing and singing, riding and dancing, to admiration"—

"And happy—say *happy* to admiration, and it will please me a thousand times more!" exclaimed Blanche, with heartfelt earnestness.

"Well, happy, then, if that word only can content you!" cried old Pro. patting her kindly on the shoulder. "For good looks depend on good health, and good health on peace of mind; and everybody seems to agree that she has grown twice as handsome since she married."

"And Lord Hartingham?" inquired Louisa, aware that her cousin's name would never pass the lips of her sister.

"Why, he, too, seems improved—according to Lady Efferville's account of the foolish fribble he was, and the gentlemanly young man he is becoming. I fancy his wife has great influence over him; and I am well taught enough in my own house to know," added Pro., with a hearty laugh, "that where the grey mare's the better horse, the mill-wheel goes round the fastest."

"Provided," added Sir George, who throughout the foregoing discourse, had been apparently poring over the advertisements in the *Times*, "provided the influence obtained by the wife is exercised for the joint interests of the family, and not to forward selfish views of her own."

"The best thing my sister could do with *her* influence over her husband," said Blanche, interfering only to prevent their visitor from becoming too pointed, "would be to withdraw him from that of his parents. So frivolous and so devoted to him, their promptings can scarcely fail to be injurious."

"I'm afraid they're scarcely rich enough to live apart," replied the 'Squire. "The young couple could not command, on their own account, the diamonds, opera-boxes, phætons, and saddle-horses, they seem to be enjoying."

"Poor Helen!" murmured her father.

"*Poor?*" cried Pro. Watts—"when all London is ringing with her praises as the queen of beauty and fashion!"

"Still, in my estimation, *poor* Helen!" repeated Sir George, with a melancholy smile. "She has less chance than I have been lately hoping, of being schooled in certain lessons of which, thanks to my criminal neglect of her more tractable childhood, she stands greatly in need!"

Perceiving the drift of his thoughts, his daughter tried to divert them by inquiries concerning the Effervilles.

CHAPTER XVI.

The inferences formed by poor Blanche from Lady Efferville's account of her sister, were not quite so comforting as those of Probyn Watts. *She* could not conceive a woman in the true possession of wedded happiness finding it necessary to seek enjoyment amidst the giddy tumults of fashion; and was afraid that Helen was only pursuing, as a wife, the same career of seeming and surface, into which, as a girl, she had entered with so much zest.

This conjecture was far nearer the truth than Lady Hartingham, if interrogated, would have been willing to allow. Beyond the fact that her beauty was the subject of general panegyric, her London season had been one of incessant vexation. Lord Hartingham's marriage had brought down upon him not only his own creditors, but those of his father; which last had been led to believe, or had chosen to believe, that his son was to succeed to an independent property on attaining his majority, when he would clear away the liabilities of Colonel Hartley; nor were these clamorous duns to be persuaded that the young nobleman who had married a wife, could by any possibility be a minor.

Altercations on this head were of daily occurrence; and those who were reluctantly convinced by the dates of peerage and parochial

registers, that, notwithstanding his maturity of appearance and habits, Lord Hartingham was to all legal intents an infant, revenged themselves for their disappointment by harassing and insulting his father. Nor, when they found that the noble minor had taken to wife a daughter of the Sir George Downham, whom a verdict in the Court of Queen's Bench had just then rendered notorious, were they the better reconciled to his proceedings.

By such annoyances were Helen's brightest pleasures overclouded. When residing, as a guest, with Lady Mary, she had entertained no suspicion of the extent of Colonel Hartley's embarrassments; and now, when it became manifest to even a person so ignorant of the money-business of life as herself, that the splendors of the house were the creation of Lord Glastonbury's fortune, she could not but inquire how much of that fortune would descend to his posterity.

"Not a guinea, my dear, beyond the Hartingham estates; which scarcely bring in a thousand a-year, now that the lime-trade is failing!" said Lady Mary one day, when tired out by the attacks of creditors, she had no longer strength to make the best of the matter to her daughter-in-law. "When my father drops, the Bishop comes in for all, except any trifle he may have laid by out of his income."

A sorry perspective this;—a perspective which made the proud Helen understand better than she had ever understood it before, the value of eight hundred a-year in hand, and eight thousand a-year in tail. And *she*, with all her clear-sightedness, to have been such a dupe!

At least, those who had deluded her, should have no cause to suppose her a repining victim; and while Blanche was enjoying the real sunshine of the heart, rejoicing like the lark, which, though soaring high in the air, still hovers over its humble nest, the beautiful Helen, the admired Lady Hartingham, was wasting the music of *her* soul wherever there were ears to hear. As the flippancy of a pretty woman is pretty sure to pass for wit, she had already come to be considered a *bel esprit*, as well as a *belle*.

"Cuts like a diamond!" cried Lord Stokesleigh, whom she occasionally favored with her piquant retorts. "Much too sharp, in my opinion, for home consumption. I could not stand a wife who sees so far into a millstone."

Not being his wife, however, Lord Stokesleigh found her society a pleasant fillip to the numbness of soul induced by the monotony of London life. She met him more than half way in the *very* small talk which such people call conversation; was well informed in the state of the odds, and well read in the Sporting Magazine, which, in compliment to her husband's pursuits, was "ordered to lie on the table." Above all, she was as calm and unenthusiastic as could be required by a *blase*, who did not care to have the golden sands in his glass shaken by raptures or rhapsodies.

Too young for perfect self-reliance, Lord Hartingham had stood a little in awe of Stokesleigh's judgment upon his wife. He remembered that, after accidentally seeing Helen Downham with her parents at some theatre in Paris, he had pronounced her to have "*asses beaux yeux pour des yeux de province;*" and was dreadfully afraid that, on recognizing her in London, he would affix an indelible stigma upon her, by some epigrammatic scorn. It was therefore a real satisfaction when his Paris Mephistopheles declared himself loudly in favor of the bride. Though as fully convinced as ever, that Colonel Hartley was a sot and Lady Mary a bore, he was ready to eat the family dinner in St. James's Square on the shortest notice; and was as tame and amenable as became the *ame damnee* of the house.

"So that 'white curd of ass's milk,' whom you taught how to lose his money like a man, in the Rue de Grammont, is learning of you, in London, how to get rid of a wife—eh, Stokesleigh?" sneered Sir Horace Lumley, one night at White's, on finding from his quondam chum, that he had been playing family whist the whole evening in St. James's Square. "Well! green as he is, I thought Hart. knew better than to introduce a wolf into his sheepfold!"

"And so he does, my dear fellow. You altogether mistake the matter. Hart. places me in his sheepfold as a watchdog, to keep off, perhaps, such dangerous wolves as yourself. It is my taste for the pleasures of domestic life alone, that takes me to St. James's Square!"

"Then why not marry?" inquired Lumley, unable to repress a smile at the impertinent *sang froid* with which this was uttered.

"Because this world has some duties which it is pleasanter to discharge by proxy."

"Or by a *Vice!*" retorted Lumley. "However, do not rely too far on Hartingham's apparent *insouciance*. For I can tell you that he is passionately fond of his wife. Remember his wanting to shoot Guy de Montmorency, at Paris, about so mere a trifle as a *coryphee!*"

"In the first place, *is* and *was* are two tenses of the verb. Hartingham is quiet enough *now*. As soon as the most vicious camel receives his burthen, you know, he ceases to kick."

"Poor Hart.!" said Sir Horace, musingly, as if pondering over his predestined fate. "Never was there a fellow so mismanaged! His foolish parents gave him dainties before nature gave him teeth;—venison, when he ought to have been eating pap,—a pony, when he should have been riding a rocking-horse,—and a hack, when he should have been bestriding a pony!"

"And now, you think, they have allowed him a wife and phæton, when he ought to have been at Oxford, taking his bachelor's degree!"

Such was the tone in which the Hartinghams and their ways were discussed by their chosen associates. The boy bridegroom, disappointed of the heart-in-heart communion of wedded bliss to which he had aspired, but the certainty of which he had wantonly flung aside, had returned to seek excitement and novelty among the *roues* of his unfinished career of folly. The pleasures of the London season were succeeded by those of Cowes; where, finding yatching a less ecstatic pastime than he had heard it proclaimed by other fashionable fools, he left his wife for a week or two to the adulation of the dry-land cabin-boys into which the idlers of

Whites and the Coventry love to transform and deform themselves during the dog-days, and hurried off to the Moors; to discover there that the pleasures of grouse-shooting are dearly bought by its labors, if the man who shares a moor with you happen to bring down a hundred brace while *you* are accomplishing threescore!

Helen was to meet him again at Doncaster; where both the Hartleys and Hartinghams were to be the guests of one of those colossal Yorkshire mansions, which maintain on such occasions the traditional hospitalities of the good old shire; and there the beautiful Helen was enchanted to levy a new tax upon popular admiration; from which, being within a very few months of her confinement, a woman endowed with womanly feelings would probably have shrunk. She deceived herself indeed into a belief that her eagerness to exhibit her fair face and London finery arose from the hope of renewing the now languid adoration of her lord. But she was far too shrewd to believe, in sober earnest, that an affection could be renovated by witnessing the admiration of the world, which had subsided while the admiration of the world was at its highest.

It was, therefore, no surprise to her when Lord Hartingham, on returning from the Highlands, as much healthier and more cheerful than when he left her as exercise and pure air could make him, showed himself still less and less disposed for the unreserved confidence of true attachment.

Fatigued in nerves by her position, as in spirit by the restlessness of a mind without stay or anchor, without religion or philosophy, and which, discontented in itself, possessed none of the foreign interests engendered by information and civilization, (those far-off sympathies which relieve the sensibility from preying on itself, as stimulants applied to the extremities of the body withdraw the dangerous pressure of the refluent blood from more vital parts) there was no health in her. Amid the gaieties of the gay, she longed to find herself once more at Glastonbury Castle, to enjoy the soothing solitude of its stately terraces and forest glades. Even her daily visits to the poor old Earl were looked forward to with pleasure; aware as she was that *he* at least contemplated the birth of her expected child as the crowning joy of his existence. He had said to Roydon, more than once, that, if permitted by Providence to hold a great-grandson in his arms, he should depart in peace.

On *his* part the feeling was genuine. Whereas the solicitude of Colonel Hartley and Lady Mary that the child might prove a boy, was attributed by her embittered feelings to the desire of securing the Downham estates by the birth of an heir in tail, instead of allowing them to devolve upon her sister Blanche.

To that dear sister Blanche, Helen could not but frequently revert in those long uneasy hours to which female companionship was so often wanting. But from that source of solace she had cut herself off! Neither now, nor at any future time, could she entreat her sister's attendance upon the wife of their cousin Hart. Even were there no poor little sister Lou, no humble home at Southwold, with prior claims upon her services, Blanche Downham could never be invited to Glastonbury Castle.

Such were the thoughts which wrung out of the heart of Helen, as out of that of Satan, the exclamation of "Evil, be thou my good!" And she began to make a feast for her pride out of the event which ought to have been a source of tenderness and joy. If a son were born to her, her consequence would be a hundredfold increased. If a son, a future Lord Hartingham, who to that empty dignity would attach the solid acres of Downham Hall, she should become so great a personage in the eyes of these lackland Hartleys as to command her own terms. No more remonstrances concerning the sauciness of her lady's maid, or the cost of her Mechlin lace! She should do as she pleased; invite Lord Stokesleigh to her whist-table four nights of the week instead of two; and make parties to Greenwich or Richmond, whenever it suited her fancy. Sir Horace Lumley should never more designate her, as he had done the preceding spring to the Austrian ambassadors, as "*la tres petite fille du Comte de Glastonbury!*"

November had gloomed away those sunless days of which not even the brevity excuses the dreariness; and Lord Hartingham, dividing his time betwixt the hunting-field and cheerful mornings at Holcombe Manor, contrived to escape his father's everlasting summons to the billiard-room or the whist-table; and his mother's tiresome complaints that Lady Hartingham was endangering the safety of their future heir, by walking when she ought to be on the sofa, or resting, when she ought to be up and about.

December at length set in; and Lady Mary was already making it a pretext for abstaining from her usual holiday invitations, that the following month, all must be kept quiet for the expected confinement of her daughter-in-law. By way of propitiating her heiress-niece, and making her sensible of the consequence of the position her wealth had bespoken, Lady Mary was resolved that larger bonfires should blaze on occasion of the advent of her first-born, louder peals be rung, and a larger christening-cake expand its iced prolixity of sugar, than would grace the birth of Lord Efferville's son and heir, or that of any other scion of the peerage born that year. Orders were issued at the forest lodge; the field pieces had been looked to on the glacis. Even the ringers were rehearsing their bob-majors, till half the village was deafened.

"Let my mother have her own way!" was Lord Hartingham's private admonition to his wife. "If you don't allow her to occupy her leisure by these ridiculous preparations, she will harass you to death, by over-solicitude about your health."

And so, Lady Mary was allowed to "have her own way;" and had it so completely, and suffered it so completely to engross her attention, that she took not her usual heed of certain unfavorable symptoms in the health of her father. The feelings of the old Earl were in fact more excited than was good for

his enfeebled frame, by the desire of bestowing a last blessing on the child of his dear Hart.

The result was, that one morning at daybreak, Colonel Hartley was roused from his stertorous rest, to learn that Lord Glastonbury had been found dead in his bed, and to break it to Lady Mary; who, in her turn, must break it to Lord Hartingham's ailing wife!

To listen to the outcry that arose in the house, any one might have supposed that the whole family imagined the infirm old man of seventy-six, to be immortal. Though for two years past, nothing had been talked of among them, but this precarious state,—there was as much consternation as when it had pleased Heaven to remove Lady Emily Downham, in her prime!

It was not, however, till Lady Mary began to indulge in preposterous plans for the funeral, that her husband was forced to remind her she had no longer a voice in the house. Already, he had despatched expresses to the new Earl of Glastonbury, and to the man of business of the deceased, to ascertain whether he had made a will.

On this, Lady Mary began to bewail herself more loudly than before.

"Was ever anything so wretched!—What would become of poor dear Helen!—For, of course, to remain in the house after her uncle and his formal family had taken possession, would be out of the question.—For her part," she added, "she thought the best thing would be for Hartingham and his wife to start at once for St. James's Square, attended by Walmsley, and escape all further annoyance."

"You forget, my dear Mary," said her husband, "that the house in St. James's Square is just as little our's to dispose of as Glastonbury Castle!"—

"Those horrible Miss Hartleys, in short, as hard, cold, and tall as the columns of Baalbeck in the Desert, may come and turn us out, either here or there, while my poor dear father is lying unburied!"—

"The *Lady* Hartleys," hinted the Colonel; an emendation to which Lady Mary responded by an angry groan. "But you cannot be serious in apprehending that any member of the family is likely to insult you;—a venerable man like the Bishop—people so respectable as the whole lot of them!"

Her Ladyship proved, however, to be almost justified in her uneasiness. For though the new Earl was too much agitated by the death of a brother only two years his senior, to quit his episcopal palace to preside at the funeral, he despatched in his place the three elder daughters, whose united ages (as the newspapers would say) amounted to one hundred and thirty-seven years, who were eager that their bombazine and broad hems should announce on the earliest possible occasion to the world, that they had progressed into the Right Honorable Lady Margaret, Lady Ursula, and Lady Mildred Hartley.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was in the comfortless smoky dreariness of a London hotel at christmas time, that the proud Helen awoke from her dream of glory; and though by much haste and with the most affectionate zeal, Lord Hartingham contrived to settle her in a private house before her hour of trial, even there, the establishment was as roughly put together as must always be the case when time and ready money are wanting. Mrs. Walmsley, her superfine waiting-maid, assured her the whole thing was "what she was by no means used to."

No will of the late Earl had been found! But it did not much matter. The credit in his banker's account was on the wrong side of the ledger; and even when the personal property purchased during his life-time should be disentangled from that which descended by unalienable right to the heir male of William, the fourth Earl, the sale thereof would barely serve to defray his just debts and funeral expenses. Meanwhile, his houses and lands—plate, pictures, and books,—had become the portion of the bewildered old man who had exchanged his mitre for a coronet, only to exchange it, a little later, for the coffin-plate and shroud.

Lady Mary Hartley was, of course, to remain for a time at the Castle, to adjust a thousand points of pecuniary interest;—the decencies of life restraining her first impetuous desire to escape from the Castle while her father lay unburied. Having explained by letter to her uncle the impossibility of removing her little girls (whom on that occasion she chose to call delicate) at that inclement season, the new Earl, who had no intention of visiting the Castle before the ensuing summer, besought her to consult her own convenience.

By the continued sojourn of Lady Mary in the north, Lady Hartingham was secured from the interference and overseership she had found so annoying. But it left her somewhat lonely. Accustomed of late to be made a fuss with, she almost missed the galling of her chains. She was perhaps the only person at Glastonbury on whom the death of the old man had inflicted a pang. Partly because Lady Mary insisted that the atmosphere of his hot rooms was pernicious to her, and partly because his genuine admiration of her had begotten kindly feelings in return, she had taken up a habit of going to sit with her grandfather, while Roydon was dining and tea-ing, and the rest of the party were more actively engaged. And on learning, one morning, that the hand which had pressed her own at parting the preceding night, was chilled for ever, the only tears of sincere affection that graced the memory of the poor old Earl, fell from her eyes.

The tenderness of these regrets was subsiding: but they served to deepen the despondency with which she saw approach her hour of trial. Though Lady Mary still talked of joining her in London, Helen saw that there was no chance of it; and every day, when her husband left her for what he called a round of business—that is, for Tattersall's, billiards, and

his club—she could not help feeling, as she looked out upon the misty deserted streets of Belgravia, where every house but the one they had taken, was closely shuttered up—that it would have been a comfort beyond description to have obtained the society of that dear sister Blanche, whose qualifications as a nurse had been the wonder of her girlhood.

Had the fashionable crowd of London been assembled, to supply idlers to drop in daily with their prattle of scandal and news, she might have felt differently. Or even had she looked upon her life to come through the prism of an overgrown fortune, she would have compounded for its moral bankruptcy. But though as unconversant with money-matters, as is too often the case with girls reared in luxury under their father's roof, she knew from Lord Hartingham's occasional ejaculations, that as soon as the attainment of his majority necessitated the winding up of his affairs, the Hartingham estate must be resigned to the Jews who had shoved him forward on his way to ruin; leaving them only her income of seven hundred and fifty pounds a-year. And as it was generally known that Lady Efferville enjoyed eight hundred for her pin money, and her young friend Lady Wilsdon a thousand, the life of pleasure to secure which she had married, vanished from before her eyes like the last sparkles of a display of fireworks, of which the unsightly scaffold-poles alone remain.

Little, meanwhile, of these evils and apprehensions was surmised at Southwold. Sir George, however rash in his speculations, conceived it impossible that the Hartleys, with so numerous a family, should have been improvident enough to squander their income, without taking care that Lord Glastonbury laid aside a handsome portion of his own for a future provision. Though aware that the Bishop succeeded to his Lordship's title and estates, he concluded, on receiving the formal letter announcing his demise, which placed himself and his daughter Blanche in mourning, that his other daughter—his Regan—his Mary of Orange, was only exchanging the roof of Glastonbury Castle for one of lesser dimensions but equal enjoyment.

Unwilling to wound his Cordelia, he abstained from expressing his opinion, that she who had proved so undutiful a child, deserved not to—

bring forth a babe to honor her.

But even if more kindly disposed towards Helen, no uneasiness would have suggested itself on her account.

On the day when the Times newspaper, (thoughtfully forwarded to him by Pro. Watts,) announced among its births, "The Lady Hartingham, of a son and heir," he had the weakness to put the babbling journal into his pocket, rather than subject himself to the outcries of joy he knew would burst from the lips of his two girls.

But he soon repented this unchristian misanthropy, and with an effort greater than one of milder temper can imagine, put the newspaper into Lady Downham's hand.

"My dear Blanche," he said, as if reserving to himself the pleasure of setting *her* mind at ease, "your sister is safe, and the mother of a son."

What joy, what unmingled joy at the Cottage! It was only Louisa who expressed some wonder that her brother-in-law had not written to apprize them of the good news.

"When he did not think us worthy the communication of his marriage!" said her mother, looking up from the paper, with a face soured by envy.

"Helen should have insisted on it.—Helen must have known that her sister's whole soul was in her safety."

"Let us find no fault with either of them to-day," interposed Blanche, whose heart leapt for joy at being relieved from the presentiments of evil by which she had been lately haunted. "I am too happy not to find everybody in the right, and everything for the best."

So bright a bloom burned upon Miss Downham's cheek from the excitement of emotions so unusually pleasurable, that Louisa could not forbear pointing out in a whisper to her father the radiancy of her beauty.

"Ay, poor child!" was his equally confidential rejoinder. "Luckily, such affection and such virtue, is its own reward. Blanche would at all times have sacrificed her life for Helen; while to save her sister from drowning, Helen would scarcely have extended her hand to Blanche!"

The little pleader shook her head at him, with a reproving smile. "You promised, dear papa," she whispered again, "that to-day, not a fault should be found!"

And none further *was* found. They sat round the fire in the small sitting-room, talking of what each could think of that was pleasantest and best; till even Lady Downham more than once chimed in to discuss some project for the spring-time, when the weather would admit of country excursions; and perhaps, as Louisa triumphantly suggested, of boating on the sea.

"A pleasant night," said Lady Downham, shuddering at the untimely supposition, "to talk of the pleasures of the sea! Listen to the howling of the wind!"

And it *did* howl most piteously! But as Louisa said, the fearful gusts and sheets of rain poured against the windows, served only to enhance the warmth of their comfortable fire-side.

"Surely I hear something more than the wind!" said Blanche, listening. "Surely carriage wheels are approaching!"

A moment, afterwards, however, a ring was heard at the house-door; and before they recovered their surprise, "a lady" was shown into the room.

The lady, though decidedly more so in appearance than was often seen at Southwold, proved to be Lady Hartingham's maid, and from her countenance, bad news were readily inferred.

She was the bearer of a letter from "my

lord," a letter addressed partly to Blanche and partly to Sir George, stating that "his poor Helen's life was in danger; that she had repeatedly asked for her sister; that it would be an act of real kindness and humanity if his cousin were permitted to get into the carriage he had sent for her, and repair immediately to town."

Without waiting for the sanction of her father, Blanche started up, as if for instant compliance. But Sir George looked grave; and Lady Downham, who was not disposed to lose sight of the second providence of the family, began to raise objections: "It was impossible for her to travel all night—more especially on a night so tempestuous. Such a journey would be too much for her,—such a journey would kill her!"

"Of course, ma'am," interposed Mrs. Walmsley, the lady's maid, "it is not for me to dictate. But though I am knocked up myself by a long journey after three days of unheard-of fatigue, I feel it my duty to start again for town. Even then, ladies, I fear there is little chance of finding my poor dear lady alive!"

Lady Downham demurred no longer; or rather, she read in the countenance of Blanche that *her* resolution was taken. Mrs. Walmsley was conducted into another room to rest and refresh herself, while Miss Downham's slight preparations were completed; and in half an hour, the postboy was to bring fresh posthorses from the inn.

When at length prepared to start, such was the violence of the tempest, that it was with difficulty the house-door could be kept open while they crossed the strip of lawn to reach the carriage; and even Sir George began to scruple about sanctioning her departure, at dead of night, in weather so inclement. But the postboy, who did not care to have been called out of his bed for nothing, assured them that on their inland road they would be screened from the influence of the see-breeze. And, finally, the carriage-door was despairingly shut, and away rolled the midnight travellers on their desolate journey.

Mrs. Walmsley, who intended to exhibit much affability towards the young lady under her charge, was astonished to find how speedily her airs were distanced by the lady-like composure of Blanche. Accustomed to the peevish starts of temper of Lady Hartingham, she was unprepared for the quiet good sense which, without indulging in exclamations of alarm concerning her sister's condition, interrogated her as to the opinion of the doctors, and Lady Hartingham's opinion of herself.

"Bless you, Miss Downham,—my lady had completely lost her reason when I came away,—my lady was raving like a wild creature!" cried Mrs. Walmsley, instead of simply describing her as delirious from fever. "A consultation of doctors was called in; but it had not taken place when I started."

"Then let us hope they suggested some more advantageous mode of treatment."

"Ay, Mem,—let us hope—if you will;—But I never saw much good come of medical consultations. The faculty, as they're called, take to squabbling among themselves, instead of struggling with the malady. Indeed, I've seen no end of harm caused by their differences of opinion and changes of treatment, dragging the poor patient up and down between one system and another, like buckets in a well."

Anxious to be left to her reflections, when she saw how little real information her companion could afford, Blanche advised her to endeavor to sleep after the severe fatigues she had undergone. And as the woman, with all her affectation, was really exhausted by watching, she soon fell into a doze; and excepting when roused at the different stages by the noise of knocking up ostlers and post-boys, and settling for horses, she contrived to slumber very audibly throughout the night.

When she did wake, indeed, she complained bitterly of the cold and the fog; of being jolted to death, with every bone in her skin aching: whereas poor Blanche, who might truly have exclaimed with Jaffier, that

At any hour, her plagues had kept her waking,

uttered not a murmur; and scarcely perceived on their arrival in the suburbs of town in the dim light of a drizzly morning, that earth and sky partook of the same dingy hue; the roads, almost impassable, bearing evidence that the violent tempest had lasted through the night.

As little did she note the ejaculations of her companion, that "her heart was in her mouth,—that she did not know how she should find courage to ask a question when they stopped at the door." For her own heart had nearly ceased to beat.

If Helen should have been taken from them! If, without one friend to sustain her courage, she should have been summoned to her dread account! All that the afflicted girl could afterwards recall to mind of her arrival, was a sudden faintness; and finding herself, some time afterwards, in a strange room on the ground-floor, where ether had been used for her recovery. She still wanted strength to inquire whether she had come too late. But a young housemaid who had been assisting her, whispered, the moment her senses seemed restored, that "my lady was no worse than the day before."

Oh! what a relief to Blanche!

A moment afterwards, Lord Hartingham, apprized of her arrival, by Walmsley, made his appearance—"unkempt, unwashed, unshorn,"—and without a word of explanation, apology, or welcome, led her up to her sister's room. There was not a shadow of consciousness or embarrassment between them at this ill-starred meeting, after their two year's separation.—Each was absorbed in Helen's danger. The only syllable they exchanged was on reaching the bed-room door; when Lord Hartingham exclaimed in a hoarse voice,—"You must not leave her a moment, Blanche, not a single moment till she is safe,—or at rest!"—

His sister-in-law replied by an assenting gesture, as she entered the room; without so much as turning towards him to assure herself,

by the sight of his haggard face, how sincere was his affliction.

Her own heart was soon to be severely tried. The sufferer had not yet recovered her consciousness! Though so weak that her murmurings were fortunately unintelligible to those around her, she talked incessantly. The only inquiry that Blanche ventured to breathe to the anxious nurse in attendance was, whether the doctors renounced all hope?

"You must ask them yourself, Ma'am. They'll be here in half-an hour.—They would not answer *me*. Medical gentlemen don't like to be questioned."

Their arrival was the signal for Blanche to take refuge in the adjoining room, while they examined their patient. And how painful and unexpected was the spectacle which met her eyes as she glided in! She had made no inquiry, since her arrival, after Helen's child. Whether it lived or died was nothing, so long as her sister's fate remained uncertain. But when she saw the poor little creature extended pale and cold in its showy crib, while a little coffin stood awaiting it on the table, she felt deeply, *deeply* touched!

A respectably dressed old woman, who had been dozing with her handkerchief over her face beside the dead infant she had been preparing for the grave, roused herself on hearing her sobs.

"Miss Blanche—dear Miss Blanche!" and "Oh! Whitfield, what a comfort to find you here!" burst from their lips at the same moment, by way of greeting.

The old nurse who, on her retreat from Sir George's household, had sought her *otium cum dignitate* where retired upper servants are much addicted to seeking it, amid the stir of a lodging-letting life, having seen in the newspaper the announcement of Lady Hartingham's confinement in Eaton Place, had "made it her duty to call for a sight of the son and heir" of her former nursling. When, finding it already dead, and her young lady in a state of the greatest danger, she had made an offer of her services during a crisis so anxious. All this was rapidly explained to Blanche; who, renewed, in reply, her terrible inquiry of "was all hope at an end!" Mrs. Whitfield, who remembering the last moments of Lady Emily, seemed to foresee a similar fate for her daughter, disconsolately shook her head. And lo! together they sat down and wept, over the present and the past!

So deathlike was the stillness of the house, that when the anxious women were warned by the creaking boots of the approaching doctors, that they were about to learn the worst, Miss Downham had not strength to rise from her chair to receive them.

It was Whitfield who at once obtained for her dear Miss Blanche the welcome verdict of "better!"—"If Lady Hartingham went on improving," they said, "before night, they should consider her out of danger.—The rambling, so alarming to the bystanders, was the mere effects of the opiates which had been administered."

While the physicians glanced slightly at the dead infant, which they regarded as merely another little atom of mortality fallen prematurely into the dust, Blanche crept back to her sister's side, and moistened her burning hand with tears and kisses.

"Who's there?"—gasped the sufferer, exhibiting a slight dawn of consciousness.—"That is not Hartingham by my side,—that is not Walmsley!"—

"It is Blanche!"—whispered her sister, gently renewing her caresses.

And Lady Hartingham spoke no more. She was indeed, as the physicians said, "much better;" for tears of joy and tenderness were already gushing from her eyes. Blanche was unspeakably happy. The fond pressure of her sister's hand satisfied her that she was thoroughly recognized!—

When the time arrived for again administering nourishment to Lady Hartingham, she put aside the fussy officious nurse, and took what was brought her, cheerfully, from the hand of her sister. Every moment seemed to increase her strength, and elucidate her intellect; so that by post-time, Blanche was able to despatch a few lines to her father, announcing her own safe arrival and Helen's amendment. She could not as yet add that the danger was past. Nor was it till the following day, and at their second visit, that the medical men rejoiced her with that welcome announcement!

CHAPTER XVIII.

So genuine was the joy with which Lord Hartingham received from the lips of his sister-in-law the assurance that his wife was in a fair way of recovery, that, but for the gossiping of servants, it never would have occurred to her that coolness could possibly subsist between them.

She was a little struck, indeed, when her brother-in-law came for a last look at the unfortunate babe, whose brief appearance on the stage of life had been the cause of so much consternation, to hear him inquire of the nurse whether Lady Hartingham appeared to fret after the child; and, on learning that she had not made a single inquiry on the subject, so that in her delicate state, they had as yet spared her the sad tidings of its death, exclaim with a bitter sigh, "Better so perhaps!—Far better, that it should be taken from us at once."—For she had imagined that Helen's attack of fever was caused, in the first instance, by the loss of her infant; and that excess of sensibility alone prevented her reverting to the subject.

But, the funeral being over, and Mrs. Whitfield's duties in the house concluded, so that she was anxious to get away for the regulation of her household affairs, the old woman could not but follow the instincts of faithful-old-servantism, by endeavoring to make some member of the family uncomfortable previous to her departure.

"Ah! my dear Miss Blanche!" said she, "God knows what a comfort it is to me to leave you with my poor dear Lady!—Things in this

house is very different, my dear, from what I was used to see 'em at poor Lady Emily's!—Everything at sixes and sevens, and far from what one's a right to expect in a nobleman's family!—Not so much as comfort,—not so much as decency,—not so much as I'm accustomed to in my own poor place at home!"—

"At such times as these," pleaded Blanche, "there must always be confusion."

"No doubt, my dear," interrupted the old nurse, "no doubt; and be sure 'tisn't of my own ill-convenience I'm thinking! But I find from my lord's own man, (who's already give warning and's on the leave,) that your grandpapa's death was the signal for a general smash. The family's as good as done up; and so far from Miss Helen making such a match for herself, poor dear, as she'd a right to expect, she'll have little or nothing to live on, if she should get through her troubles. *That* was no doubt the reason that my lord said this morning, in that melancholy voice, when he was looking at the dear cherub's innocent face as it lay on its little white satin pillow, that it was taken from evil to come!"

"There must be great exaggeration in all these stories, my dear Whitfield," replied her former nursling, anxious to check the reports she was about to carry with her out of the house. "The Hartingham estates, to which my cousin will succeed on coming of age, are valued, my father tells me, at 30,000*l*."

"And what's thirty thousand pounds, my dear Miss Blanche, to a nobleman born? Besides, bless you, since I've been here, I've been quite behind the curtain; and what with the coming in of Christmas bills, and the blustering of troublesome creditors, I can't doubt but my lord has eaten his corn in the ear; nay, like the starving Irish, taken up his seed potatoes, for the matter o' that. What they'll have to look to, poor young folks, the Lord above can only tell!"

"You must not, however, make the worst of things," remonstrated Blanche. "For if all this came to be talked about, Whitfield, true or false, it would greatly increase their difficulties."

"In course, my dear, in course! For after all, my lord is but a boy; and boys *will* be boys!"

"He would be much offended, I fear, Whitfield, to know that you applied the word to him."

"Let him be thankful, then, that I say no worse!" said the old nurse, with a sagacious nod. "Bless you, Miss Blanche, there's not a servant in the house, from Mrs. Walmsley downwards, but knows that my lady's illness was brought on by a quarrel betwixt her and my lord: he wanting to cram the place up with his father and mother, and their people; and she, declaring that she couldn't and she wouldn't have Lady Mary with her during her confinement, worrying her to death at such a time. My lady took ill, ma'am, before the dispute was half at an end; no nurse in the house, and but little preparation! And so you'll admit, that my lord, with his foolish boyish obstinacy, was the sole cause of losing his child, and nigh the cause of losing its poor dear mother!"

It was easy for Miss Downham to impose silence on the old lady; who, though by vocation a gossip, was really attached to the former nurslings whom she still designated among her familiars as the Diamond and the Pearl of Downham Hall. But it was not so easy to silence her own anxieties. Though still convinced that the state of the case was made the most of by its transit through the housekeeper's room, all that she saw and heard tended to confirm the fact that there was nearly as much penury under the roof of Lord Hartingham, as under that of his ruined father-in-law.

It was on the evening of Whitfield's departure that Helen, refreshed by a first removal from her bed to the sofa, requested the baby might be brought down from the nursery, for her to look at.

"You are afraid perhaps of risking the cold air of the staircase, as you have never yet allowed me to see it?" said she, addressing the solemn nurse, with whom her preference of Blanche's attendance rendered her no favorite.

"We always wait, my lady, till the mother asks for the child," was the woman's evasive reply, looking around to Miss Downham for assistance; who, thus appealed to, came kneeling to the sofa side, in utter terror of the effect the sad event she had to communicate could not fail to produce.

"And why was I not told before?" exclaimed Lady Hartingham, when Blanche, with the tenderest and most delicate reluctance, informed her that the poor little creature she inquired after was released from its mortal coil.

"You were not in a state to undergo such a shock."

"It is no shock to *me*, Blanche! For rather have my child taken from me at once, than be constantly subjected to Lady Mary's interference in its management, as, from the way in which Hartingham was beginning to talk and act, was certain to have been the case."

Against this heartless declaration, the astonished Blanche could not forbear protesting; "Impossible," she said, "for a husband to display intenser grief than Hartingham, during her danger."

"More probably for the loss of his son and heir!" rejoined Helen, in a voice whose faintness seemed to render more striking the hard unfeminine nature of the sentiments it developed; "though heir to WHAT, poor child! the Hartley tribe would have been a little puzzled to explain!"

By these harsh revelations, at a moment so sacred, Blanche was almost more heart-wrung than on first beholding her sister, unconscious, fever-stricken, dying! And when the still feeble invalid commenced a fresh attack upon Lady Mary, her sister could not forbear expressing her regret at hearing such indications of enmity from one so lately on the brink of the grave!

"And who placed me there?" demanded

Lady Hartingham, grasping her sister's hand. "What was the cause of all my danger?—Simply that I was rash enough to open a letter from Glastonbury, during my husband's absence, which I thought was addressed to us both; whereas, it was a 'private and confidential' missive from Lady Mary to her son, advising him to take the utmost care of me and my expected child, because—(mark the *because*, dear Blanche!)—because his only chance of escape from pauperism lies in the inheritance I am to derive from my father's death!"

Blanche Downham shuddered; and her sister, attributing her horror to these penurious prospects, rejoined:

"Dreadful is it not? For, after all, were Lady Downham to die, my father might marry again and have male heirs; and then, Hartingham would have to break stones on the road!"—

"I was not thinking of *that!*" said Blanche, faintly. "I was thinking of the sinfulness of letting mere money-matters interfere with the holiest charities of life!"

"Not on my part, Blanche! You must perceive, that all these sordid considerations originated with the Hartleys, father, mother, and son!"—

"The father and mother I cannot pretend to judge. But I believe your husband's distress at your danger to have been as pure and disinterested a feeling as ever warmed a human heart!"

Helen was nettled. "I never doubted," said she, turning on her side upon the sofa, as if to exclude all view of her sister, "that *you* would prove his champion. He was always a favorite of yours."

At this unkind attack, Blanche rose from her knees and quitted the room. Not that the significance of her sister's words or looks affected her. She was conscious of having met her cousin Hart., and of feeling towards him, so completely as it became her to feel, that the poisoned shaft could find no vulnerable place. What grieved her was the discovery, that nothing would soften Helen's stubborn nature: not even the searching of adversity—not even the tender mercies of God!

She did not, however, long absent herself from the sick chamber; much forbearance being indispensable towards that poor, frail sister. When she opened the door, Helen was weeping bitterly; not because, as for a moment she hoped, she had risked the infliction of pain upon one so devoted to her; but because the nurse, on finding the grand secret of the infant's death and burial revealed, had been enlarging, according to the customs of such people, upon the pathetics of the case; the beauty of the babe in its coffin, and the mournfulness of laying in the ground a creature which had enjoyed so little of the earth's sunshine!

But the moment Lady Hartingham's tears were shed, her grief vanished.

"After all," she said, "it was but a poor helpless little infant, which she had neither seen nor loved."

"You must not be angry with me, Blanche, for being weak and nervous," she exclaimed, drying her eyes on her sister's entrance. "On the contrary, you should do your best to make me more cheerful. Bring your chair nearer, and read the evening paper to me; or tell me what news arrived this morning in your letter from Southwold?"

"It was not from Southwold. It was from Doesbury Lodge."

"From Doesbury!" exclaimed Helen, whose spirits, weak as she was, were already rising. "Has Mrs. Pro. adopted you then as a correspondent, in place of her cerulean friend, the accomplished author of I don't know how many unreadable treatises? Or has Pro. bespoken your hand for his beloved Jack? Let me see! Jack will be five-and-twenty next grass, as his father would say."

"It is indeed Mr. Watts who writes to me," said Blanche, pained by her levity. "But he says nothing about Jack. His letter was one of inquiry after yourself."

"Show it me, then."

"At present, your doctors prohibit reading."

"Then read it yourself!"

At which command, Blanche proceeded to recapitulate, in Pro. Watts's homely phrase, the inquiries to which she had alluded; and an earnest prayer that Lady Hartingham's health might not detain her sister long in town.

"But that is not all!" cried Helen, on seeing her sister re-fold the letter, and replace it in her pocket. "You have read me only a dozen lines;—and the letter is crossed and re-crossed!"

"The remainder relates to subjects which it might be disagreeable to you to hear discussed."

"Our family affairs? On the contrary, I like to know what people say about us!"

"Not our family affairs——"

"What, then, Blanche? I told you before, that I was much too nervous to be trifled with."

"The very reason I spared you the rest of Mr. Watts's letter! I was afraid you might not like to hear all he says about the Effervilles!"

"What can such a man have to say about the Effervilles that concerns my feelings?——"

"Nothing whatever. He writes of them, as he probably used to write about ourselves when we were living at Downham."

"Then pray let me hear the style of thing he feels privileged to write about his country neighbors."

"The doings consist of the grand christening of their son and heir, to which the Watts's were invited."

Lady Hartingham's spirits fell. She was not aware of the event which had crowned the happiness of the young Viscount's prosperous marriage.

"They have a son, have they? So much for their doings! And now, what of their sayings?"

"The only sayings related to me, consist in their constant inquiries after the health of Lady Hartingham. The letter, indeed, seems prompted by his desire to afford them information of your recovery."

"Ay, ay! Pro. Watts is just the savage to mistake the ordinary politenesses of society for intense personal interest:—just as some stupid traveller takes *au pied de la lettre*, an Oriental's offer of his house and all that it contains! But tell me, Blanche, what are the Effervilles doing at Downham Hall?"

"I have never seen the place since we left it. But they tell me that Savory, the upholsterer, has furnished it in the most princely style."

"Bad taste, then! The house is not of an order to admit of princeliness."

"At all events, the taste displayed is sufficiently good to enchant our quondam neighbors. It is the first time that anything so splendid has been seen in Suffolk. But I will not talk to you any more just now, dear Helen. You ought to sleep. You have exerted yourself too much. I will go and fetch a book and read by the fireside while you doze."

The only books in the house consisted of a few volumes which Lord Hartingham had procured from a circulating library in the neighborhood; and having been greatly interested the preceding night by a work of Eastern Travel, she proceeded to seek the second volume in the drawing-room, where it had been left by her cousin. No fear of finding him at home at that hour of the day; he seldom returned before dinner-time.

On hurrying into the room, however, the blinds being drawn down and the fire blazing, she was surprised to find him reclining on a sofa near the fire-place; and believing him to have been asleep at her entrance, commenced an explanation of her errand as an apology for having disturbed him.

Much to her annoyance, the person who started up on finding himself thus familiarly addressed, was a stranger—a striking-looking, middle-aged man, who, for the moment, appeared as puzzled as herself.

"It is for me to excuse myself, lady fair, for being found here," said he, advancing towards her with a strange familiarity. "I am waiting for Lord Hartingham. Johnson informed me he was expected home about six o'clock."

"Hardly so early. Lord Hartingham is seldom at home before seven," added she, suspecting (and with reason) that she was mistaken for Mrs. Walmsley.

"In that case," replied the stranger, "I had better take myself off. The more so, that I now see my errand would have been infructuous. I wanted Hartingham to dine with me. I was not aware he possessed at home metal more attractive."

There was a certain freedom in the tone and air of the man who addressed her, which sounded the alarm to Blanche's pride.

"I am so fully engaged with my sister," said she, "that Lord Hartingham always dines alone. I can therefore be no possible obstacle, sir, to his accepting your invitation."

Having taken, while she spoke, from the table, the book of which she was in search, she made a formal curtsey to her brother-in-law's free-and-easy friend, and quitted the room.

"*Capital stage* exit, by Jupiter!" muttered he, laughing between his teeth, and resuming his recumbent position on the sofa. For, though satisfied that he should have to wait for his friend longer than he had bargained for, he was more than ever anxious to secure his company. He wanted to hear something from Hart. about the handsome sister-in-law who was kind enough to keep house for him during the illness of his wife.

"If ever I marry," thought he, as he stretched himself anew upon the silken cushions, "it shall be into a large family. A pleasant thing enough, to have one ready on all emergencies to pour out one's tea, and help one pull the merry thought of one's chicken! Such a lovely creature, too!"

The result of his visit was, that when, towards eight o'clock, Lord Hartingham requested admittance to his wife's sick room, for an affectionate inquiry after her health, he mentioned, in bidding her good bye for the evening, that he was going to dine out.

It was the first time he had absented himself since her illness; and the curiosity of Helen, who had been slumbering while her sister read, was a little excited. She inquired where he was going to dine?

"At White's," was the curt reply.

Blanche, who was present, as he made no allusion to his recent visitor, conceiving that he had some motive for his reserve, said nothing on the subject to her sister; but persisted in reading her book of travels, in hope that Helen might sleep.

Next day she was harshly rebuked for what her sister was pleased to call her unaccountable mysteriousness. "Hart., who has been sitting with me for the last hour," said she, "tells me that he concluded you would inform me he dined with Lord Stokesleigh."

"How could I tell you a thing I did not know, my dearest Helen? I never heard the name of Lord Stokesleigh till this moment!"

"Tell not that to any one but me, Blanche! or they will think you were brought up, like Lady Teazle, to ride double behind the coachman in some country village! But you had an interview with him yesterday, my dear, when he was waiting for Hart.?"

"A gentleman was certainly in the drawing-room when I went to look for a book."

"—*which* gentleman was Lord Stokesleigh! —the greatest match and greatest *roue* in England."

"As one condition invalidates the other," replied Blanche, smiling at her earnestness, "you do well to mention them together."

"I assure you there is nothing to laugh at in Lord Stokesleigh! Not a girl in London but would be enchanted to have made such an impression on him as Hart. tells me you have effected!"

"In that case, he must be singularly impressionable, my dear Helen. I saw him only for five minutes, and we scarcely exchanged as many words."

"The very reason,—the very reason! Had he seen more of you, and known you to be a young lady and my sister, he would have closed his eyes and ears against your attractions. Lord

Stokesleigh has a horror of everything of the sort. But he told my husband he took you for the lady's maid, (in deep mourning, you know, there is no distinction of persons,) and thought you the most beautiful creature he ever beheld in his life."

"It would seem to be a studied retort, that I took *him* for a tradesman waiting for the payment of a bill," replied Blanche; "but such I assure you is the fact. Even in *that* capacity, I was not charmed with him. His countenance is hard—his manner almost insulting!"

"Is it your intention, then, Blanche," inquired Helen, abruptly, "to spend the remainder of your days in a hovel on the Suffolk coast, mending Lady Downham's house-linen, and playing the governess to that poor child of whom you were so long the nurse?"

"I hope I may be always content with home, wherever it may be appointed; and Southwold is at present *my home!*" replied Miss Downham, a little startled. Then, lest the gravity of her tone should appear too much like a rebuke to the invalid, she added, "but where is the association, Nelly dear, between teaching or nursing poor Lou., and the harshness of Lord Stokesleigh's countenance?"

"I mean that, with proper management, such an impression as you seem to have made upon him *ought* to lead to your becoming his wife."

"I am not fond of management in such cases," replied Blanche, good humoredly. "In proof of which, I could show you a corner of my poor friend Mr. Watts' letter, reproaching me bitterly for having declined to spend the Christmas holidays with him, after his planning so cleverly to bring me and his son together."

"Management, concerning a horrible lout like John Watts!"

"In his father's estimation, he is probably a Lord Stokesleigh."

"This, then," exclaimed her sister, "is the cause of your yea-nay contentment at Southwold? You mean some day or other to marry this odious animal! You want to be the squire's lady at Doesbury!"

"It is not above twice in the year I so much as see the 'odious animal,'" replied Blanche, a little amused by this waste of vehemence. "When I first remember him, he was shy, dull and ill-mannered. He is now a rising barrister, according to his parents' account, highly thought of in his profession."

By this time, Helen had fallen into a profound reverie. She had never been able to account to herself for the more than Christian kindness exhibited towards her family by that of Doesbury Lodge. She understood all now. They wanted Blanche as a wife for their son! They wanted *her* sister—Lady Hartingham's *sister*—to become a Mrs. John Watts! The very thought of such an alliance produced a fresh accession of fever, and saline draughts were called for.

About a week afterwards, just as her amendment was progressing so rapidly that Blanche felt free to deliberate upon the prospects of two people whose chief study it seemed to drive those prospects from their thoughts, Lord Hartingham walked one day into his wife's dressing-room, accoutred in what he called his "travelling toggery."

"I'm come to wish you good-bye, for a day or two, Helen!" said he, on finding her alone. "Stokesleigh has offered me the run of his preserves, which have not been shot these two years; and I thought it a good opportunity to avail myself of his offer, while Blanche was with you, to relieve my conscience of the crime of leaving you alone."

"But why not tell me yesterday? Why make a secret of your plans, to burst out with them at the last moment?"

"In order to leave no time, you probably think, for you to raise objections? No, Nell! Our plans, as you call them, were concocted last night at White's, an hour or two after you were in bed and asleep; and we are off early in the day, that we may sup and sleep at Stokesleigh Manor."

"How thoroughly stupid!" was Lady Hartingham's peevish rejoinder, as she sat turning over the pages of the February number of Le Follet.

"Do you call it stupid to avoid being benighted in the sands of a Norfolk bye-road?"

"I was not thinking of your journey! You and Lord Stokesleigh are the last people in the world not to take excellent care of yourselves!"

Lord Hartingham, evidently in haste, looked impatient for further explanations.

"I called you stupid for accepting any invitation, just now, from Lord Stokesleigh; when, a fortnight hence, Blanche and I should have been able to accompany you."

"And before a fortnight is over, the shooting season will have closed! Besides, Stokesleigh gives only bachelor parties; and even those, few and far between."

"Say rather that he has *hitherto* given only bachelor parties. What he will give for the future, might be made to depend on the impression my sister has made upon him."

"'Tis a match-trap, then, you have in view?" cried Hart., with a contemptuous smile. "Put that crotchet out of your head, Helen! Deer-stalking is easy sport compared with bringing down an old buck like Stokesleigh. Upon *him* a young lady acts like a scare-crow! He has never set foot in this house since he encountered Blanche!"

"Take notice, on the other hand, that he has been civiler to you, of late, than he ever was in his life."

"If you call it civility for two men to dine together occasionally, who are both going to see the pantomime!"

"I call it civility to take you down with him into Norfolk in his *dormeuse*, which he never dreamed of doing before."

"Stokesleigh seldom gives shooting parties. Being too idle a dog to refuse, (he says,) it is better to oblige nobody than have to oblige everybody. He don't choose to make precedents!"

"Except in favor of Blanche's brother-in-law. The French have a saying, that 'nothing so nearly resembles friendship as the court we pay to the relatives and friends of those we ove!'"

"I certainly remember giving the best shooting at Glastonbury to Ralph Holcombe, when I was desperately in love with Lizzy," retorted Hart., who cited the Holcombes whenever he wished to annoy his wife.

"The very reason," rejoined the lady, to whom it was not just then convenient to be affronted, "that you should perceive Lord Stokesleigh's disposition to fall in love with Blanche, and do your utmost to promote it!"

"Is this Blanche's speculation, pray, or yours?" he angrily inquired.

"Mine, exclusively mine! The match would be an excellent one for *her*, and a capital thing for ourselves. Situated as we are, Hart., a few useful friendships would be invaluable."

The glance with which her young husband surveyed her, as he proceeded to take a hurried leave on the plea that Stokesleigh was waiting for him at the Clarendon with his carriage ready packed, was tempered by a feeling nearly approaching to disgust.

As he hurried headlong down stairs, he could not forbear muttering,—"at all events, I'm glad that *she*, poor thing!—had no hand in it!"

CHAPTER XIX.

An hour later, Miss Downham, who had been occupied in replying to her Doesbury letter, found her sister out of spirits and out of temper, turning over a basket of visiting cards.

"Only imagine," cried she, "that Hart. is gone down shooting into Norfolk—leaving us to be bored to death here during his absence!"

"As we seldom see him more than once in the four-and-twenty hours, ——" Blanche was beginning. But her sister interrupted her.

"Yes; but remember, *that* visit is the only one we receive; and now, we have not a soul to tell us what is passing in the world!"

"I do not exactly understand what you mean by the world," said Blanche. "Surely a couple of newspapers, one of either party, tell us more than enough of all that is going on, in Europe or elsewhere!"

"*I* call the world, what every body else calls it,—the Clubs—the Houses of Parliament,—where alone new opinions are formed, and new facts promulgated. And wanting some direct means of communication with this world, (for so, *sauf votre bon plaisir*, I persist in regarding it,) one must content oneself with the distorted reports and stale gossip, diffused like the Plague from house to house by morning visitors, chattering apothecaries and country correspondents."

Blanche Downham turned away from the table where her sister was sorting the cards, in order to conceal a smile.

"I have before me grievous proof of the necessity of having some member of one's own family to amuse one," added Helen, "in the deplorable array of names of these inquirers after my ladyship's health. Not a soul in town, at this season, but officials and a few dreary dowagers! And lo! our country cousins who have been translated to the see of St. James's Square, 'the Earl of Glastonbury,' 'the Countess of Glastonbury,' and 'the Ladies Hartley,'—for the fourth time! These people seem disposed to be civil, Blanche, in spite of all the ill-natured things Lady Mary writes about the elder daughters;—or perhaps they wish to mark that they have no ill-feeling against us. Admire, my dear Blanche, what packs of cards they leave for us, never forgetting 'Miss Downham!'"—

"Never forgetting Lady Emily Downham's second daughter. Me, they have never seen!"

"But they ought to see you, Blanche: they ought to see and know you. Lord Glastonbury is now the head of my mother's family; and as such, as well as by his position in the world, entitled to our utmost respect. Instead of sending them a formal circular of 'return thanks,' therefore, you must go and call in poor old St. James's Square, where I see by their card, they are already settled."

"Better wait till you are re-established, dearest Helen; and then, we will go together."

"No!—by that time Lady Mary will probably be in town; and perhaps make it a point with Hartingham that we should keep up a family quarrel of our own creation. Whereas, if the acquaintance is pre-established, opposition will be useless."

Still, Blanche demurred; till Helen declared that, if her sister resisted further, she would brave the authority of the nurse, (which had still a few days unexpired of its term,) and wrap herself up in furs to accompany her in the visit: a threat which decided Miss Downham's acquiescence.

Few spots or scenes had made a stronger impression upon her than the mansion in St. James's Square. Lady Mary's showy domicile struck her inexperienced eye as the acme of brilliant elegance.—The objects of virtu with which the drawing-rooms were crowded,—the profusion of rare flowers that perfumed its atmosphere,—the easy intelligence of the servants in attendance,—the confusion of people and things where nevertheless nothing jarred disagreeably,—constituted one of those mental pictures, to which we recur till they become indelible; and to which Blanche had reverted again and again the preceding year, when the spot was inhabited by that dear sister to whom she hoped its pleasantness was affording a delightful home.

She approached the house, therefore, curious only respecting her aunt and cousins. With the locality, she fancied herself perfectly acquainted: and when the gravest-looking butler she had ever seen, followed by a grim footman, both of whom seemed to possess the same property as port wine, of becoming crusty with age, ushered her up an echoing stone staircase, destitute of a vestige of carpet, she could scarcely reconcile that dim, grey fog-and-smoke-reeking house with the gay and fragrant spot which poor Lady Mary had converted into a Temple of the Graces.

To Blanche's cursory glance, it was like the change of a summer into a winter landscape; or rather, it resembled one of the transitions occasioned by vicinity to a volcano, where the

brightest verdure and fairest flowers are suddenly eclipsed by a heavy fall of ashes.

At present, the change appeared only too consonant with the tastes of the formal old lady who rose perpendicularly from her chair, smoothing her black apron over her puce-colored gown, to welcome her unknown niece: Lady Glastonbury's gray hair being frizzed under a stiff lawn cap into something as episcopal,—something as nearly representing the female gender of a bishop's wig,—as could well be conceived.

But though cold and formal, the old lady was strictly corteous; and expressed her sympathy in Lady Hartingham's danger, with the ceremonious politeness with which such events used to be noted before the world was in too great a hurry to be civil.

"Poor young creature!" she said, "the loss of her first-born must have been a most afflicting trial to her!"

Previous to his twenty years' mitredom, the Earl had been a richly-beneficed dignitary of the Church, residing in a stiff-necked cathedral town; where, conscious perhaps that he had embraced his profession for the sake of a noble family living, Dr. Hartley endeavored to make up for his lack of spirituality in the most rigid observance of its outward and visible forms. Wife, children, household, all without speck or blemish, were as much disciplinarians as himself. His contributions to public charities were exemplary;—his almsgiving as strictly regulated as the orthodoxy of his examining chaplains;—and when he progressed to the highest dignities of the Church, so ample or so august a wig had never appeared upon the bench.

Happy for that bench, however, if, at the epoch long past, when family influence like that of the Hartleys was able to promote narrowness of intellect and barrenness of grace to functions so important, they had always been so inoffensively represented as by the Right Honorable and Right Reverend Earl; who on learning that his grand-niece was under his roof, stalked like a High Priest of Brobdignag into the room, to bid her welcome.

Blanche Downham rose on his entrance,—a little overawed perhaps by his lordship's grandeur of aspect, and amplitude of wig. But the feeling gave way before the thoughtfulness with which he inquired not only after her sister, but her father,—whom he had known in former years, when Sir George, had been a "rising young man" in the House. And though this attention was the mere result of his lordship's conscientious punctilio of etiquette,—there was real feeling in the tone in which he informed her that "she resembled poor Lady Emily:" the death of a brother so nearly his contemporary as the late Earl, having recently stirred up the dormant charities of consanguinity in his somewhat marrowless nature.

"Has your ladyship caused Lord Hartley and his sisters to be apprized of their cousin's visit?" was his formal inquiry to the well-matched partner of his honors.

"Then pray let the young ladies be told that Miss Downham is here," persisted his lordship, on learning that Lord Hartley was from home.

"My young people are taking their daily walk in the Square," was Lady Glastonbury's explanation of their absence. "The poor things have been used to regular exercise; and would soon lose their health and spirits in town, if they neglected their wholesome country habits. But we will make an early call upon Lady Hartingham, that I may have the satisfaction, Miss Downham, of seeing you become acquainted."

Pleased with the kindly notice she had received, poor Blanche, after taking leave of the venerable couple, descended the stairs with a light-footed agility so little customary in the establishment, that she reached the vestibule before the sour butler and superannuated footman arrived there to call up her carriage, stationed under shelter of the railings of the Square; and she consequently stood exposed to the observation of a gentleman who had just entered, and was hanging up his hat in the hall. He was one of those whom vulgar taste calls handsome; but more discriminating eyes could discern that the close-curled crop of his diminutive head, and the small features of his unmeaning face, (to neither of which the fifty years which had passed over them had imparted a grey hair or a wrinkle,) preserved the expressionless vacuity of boyhood. The narrowness of his soul was seen at a glance; and though his stature and air imparted something of distinction to what would have been utterly insignificant if connected with fewer inches, Blanche Downham, suspecting with truth that she beheld her cousin, Lord Hartley, no longer wondered at her brother-in-law's declaration that he had a *faux air* of juvenility, like a golden pippin preserved in wax, simply because he had done nothing all his life except take care of himself.

Though readily surmising the identity of the lovely young woman attired in deep mourning before him, he did not trouble himself to expedite the arrival of her carriage; first, because, having divested himself of his great-coat, he would not for worlds have exposed himself to a current of cold air by handing her to it! secondly, because, if he began to be civil to this decayed branch of the Hartley family, there was no saying what trouble it might not entail!

Of those with whom her visit to St. James's Square had brought her acquainted, the only fault found by Blanche on her return to her sister, was with this blooming and precise middle-aged gentleman.

"Exactly what I imagined him to be!" cried Lady Hartingham, on learning his selfish lack of courtesy. "Exactly what Colonel Hartley always described him! Through life he has been worshipped by his spinster sisters, as something super-human; and at ———, where the Episcopal palace gives the law, Mr. Hartley was the reigning Sir Charles Grandison. Wherever he went, the ladies curtseyed and simpered; while the men vainly endeavored to imitate his prim solemnity."

Nevertheless, when, the following week, Lord Hartley called in Eaton Place with his mother's apologies for delaying her promised visit with her young people, as they had reason to fear that Lady Harriet was sickening with the

measles, Helen did not fail to suggest to her sister, (to whom his meagre conversation was principally addressed,) that she had made a conquest of the man in buckram!

"You cannot raise the same objections against Lord Hartley as against Stokesleigh," persisted Helen, perceiving that her sister was disinclined to answer; "Lord Hartley, at least, is not a *roue!*"

"A sordid egotist, I am afraid, which is nearly as bad. Luckily, he will never require me to decide upon his merits, for I own I hold them miserably cheap!"

"You don't hold Glastonbury Castle cheap, I hope, with its income of twelve thousand a-year?"

"If to be shared with a man who has eaten, drunk, and slept through half a century, without exercising a single feeling or faculty for the benefit of his fellow-creatures!"

"You were always a cool reasoner, Blanche!" replied Lady Hartingham, with a supercilious shrug of the shoulders. "*I* am apt to *jump* at *my* conclusions; and seldom find them worse than those to which other people crawl on their knees."

Miss Downham's notions of matrimony were a source of some uneasiness. Helen had made up her mind that some illustrious and illustrating alliance should at once serve to elevate her sister and herself; and how grievous a falling off, if, in spite of these aspirations, Blanche were to content herself with becoming Mrs. Watts, of Doesbury Lodge! On Lord Hartingham's return from his shooting-party, she forgot her displeasures against him, to confide her misgivings concerning her sister. It would be shocking, if she were to contract the ambitions due to her fortune and connections, into daughter-in-lawship to a Mr. Probyn Watts!

"I should be sorry, certainly; but, after all, it would be only natural," was his frank reply. "Whom else but these people does she see at Southwold?"

"Then we must positively prevent her going back! She must stay with *us!* She ought to be seen in London!"

"*Entre nous*, Helen, I fear the time is coming when we ourselves are little likely to be seen in London!"

"But till then?——"

"Till then, you can scarcely doubt my desire that she should be your constant companion. I doubt, however, whether you will prevail over the scruples of Blanche."

Lady Hartingham tried, however—and hard, and infructuously.

"Now my brother-in-law is come back, my dear Helen," said the Pearl, a day or two after his return, "you must really spare me back to my father."

"Nonsense, nonsense! What can papa possibly want with you? He is not infirm; his eyesight is good; you are not required to read to him, or write for him."

"I am required to talk and walk with him. He wants me as a companion."

"He ought to content himself with the society of his wife! I remember the time when Lady Downham so engrossed his attention, that he scarcely recollected he had daughters in the world!"

"Better forget it," mildly replied Blanche. "I have driven those disagreeable days quite out of my recollection."

"As if memory were a faculty under our control!"

"Far more so, dearest sister, than thoughtless persons believe. But it is not alone for my father's sake I must return home: think of poor Lou.!"

"Why should the interests of one sister weigh more with you than those of the other?"

"Because *you* have your husband—*you* have the world!"

"And Louisa, her parents!——"

"If you count Lady Downham as a mother, who, from the day of the poor child's birth, has never regarded her otherwise than as an incumbrance!"

Lord Hartingham happening at that moment to enter the room, his wife appealed to him for aid to shake her sister's resolution.

"Helen has often told me, my dear Blanche," said he, hastening to obey her, "that one of your reasons for remaining with your father is, that your income is necessary to his support. But why not leave it at his disposal? Leave him every guinea of it—leave him every guinea, and share the best we have, so long as you will consent to remain with us. I'm afraid, indeed, the best will be only brown bread and butter, and porridge without salt. But *you* are not the person, Blanche, to care whether you sleep on wool or eider-down!"

"Or straw, if among those with whom I feel I ought to be," replied his cousin, grateful for his just appreciation of her. "But my father would feel very differently in receiving, as an allowance, what he does not more scruple to *share* with me than a child to eat at its father's table. Besides," added she, in a less assured voice, "I doubt whether, even were I free from other ties, Helen would be as well pleased to have me for an inmate as she fancies, now that it is impossible. I have played the governess so long to a younger sister, that I might take upon me, oftener than she would like, to preach to an elder."

"And you could not do better!" thoughtlessly interrupted Lord Hartingham. "For my own part, Blanche, I should be thankful to you for an occasional lecture!"

At that avowal, the entreaties of Helen became less urgent.

Before the day appointed for her return home—a day how watched for, and waited for, and prayed for, at Southwold, needs not to say—Blanche made a vain attempt to induce the Hartinghams to decide, before she left them, upon their future plans. To reside in London on an income such as theirs, would, she proved to them by the expenses they had already incurred, entail certain ruin. The very rent of the house they occupied absorbed half their income.

"We must go abroad, then, at the end of the season," was Helen's languid rejoinder. "Lady Mary and the Colonel, indeed, will establish themselves at once on the continent.

An excellent plan for *them*, who require cheap masters for the girls!"

"An excellent plan for nobody, in my opinion," rejoined her sister. "The cheapness of the continent is, after all, only the cheapness of a place where the comforts and decencies of life may be dispensed with without loss of caste."

"At all events, if one *must* be poor and uncomfortable, better avoid exhibiting our rags and tatters for the amusement of one's friends."

"Still better, my dearest sister, avoid the perils and dangers incurred in a foreign land," pleaded Miss Downham. "Enervated by a life of leisure and pleasure, Hartingham will lose all taste for the pursuits to which, you sometimes tell me, you look forward to endow him hereafter with affluence and distinction."

This last insinuation ought to have had some weight with Helen, who had often signified to her sister, that when, two years hence, her husband took his seat in the House of Lords, he would be immediately enriched by "a good place;" as if, to discharge the functions of even the least responsible place, some mental cultivation were not wanting beyond the power of spelling over a novel, or *mis*spelling an illegible note!

"Don't be so uneasy about us, Blanche!" cried Lady Hartingham, her patience by this time worn out. "We shall fight on as well as our neighbors. Even if we *should* end in the workhouse instead of Grosvenor Square and an opera box, depend upon it, sister," added she, with ungenerous spite, "it shall be that of our own parish! Entertain no further fears of our becoming an incumbrance at Southwold!"

On Blanche's return to her family, it was a source of heartfelt grief to her father to perceive how deep a shade of care was added to her countenance. Recollecting his own early delusions and predilections, he fancied that her inexperienced nature had been enthralled by the varied pleasures of the great emporium of luxury and intellectuality. Nor did Blanche attempt to deceive him. Better that he should fancy her pining after radiant theatres and cheerful assemblies—the society of the young, the gay, the accomplished—than that he should know how anxious were her fears for that beautiful and brilliant sister, whose head, heart, and purse, were alike bankrupt.

With more than one Lord Stokesleigh for tempter, and a legion of Lord Hartleys for detractors, their dear Helen's course among the burning ploughshares was one that it was far from re-assuring to dwell on!

CHAPTER XX.

The seven-leagued boots of the novelist are now about to make a five years' stride.

Lady Downham, clawed in body and soul by the talons of an all-absorbing passion, was withered into premature decrepitude; her hollow eyes and sinewy throat betraying the spirit of avarice preying upon her nature; while, on the other hand, her husband was gradually sinking under infirmities of mind and body: and if Lady Hartingham was hailed by the world as more lovely than ever, and more than ever witty and fascinating, those who looked with careful eye, saw that the bloom had vanished from the fruit, and the dew evaporated from the flower, through the glare of vulgar exposure. She who had been called only "pretty" was now, indeed, termed "beautiful." But she who was still called fascinating, was also branded with the name of a dangerous coquette.

The Hartinghams had been living much in the world; sometimes, during a flush of temporary prosperity, shining, as they were entitled, on the exclusive stage of fashionable life. At other moments, and these, alas! were of more frequent occurrence, skirting the select throng: seeking diversion among titled swindlers at Baden, and *taree* refugees at Paris; or scrambling through the meagre sociabilities of a Brighton winter, the Albata substitute for fashion.

That the *desœuvre* young lord had become a gambler, no one can doubt. His associates regarded play as the inevitable vice of his position; while *he* protested that, like any other speculation, it purported improvement of means unimprovable by more regular practices.

Throughout the vicissitudes of his career, whether winning at Doncaster or losing at Crockford's, or hazarding in steeple-chases for gain, the neck he would have been sorry to expose to any lesser risk for passtime, Hartingham was usually accompanied by Stokesleigh; remotely, when unlucky, when fortunate, close at hand. The fashionable world decided that the *roue* Lord paid money for the husband and court to the wife; whereas he had not sufficient expansion of heart to be in either case so imprudent.

As, however, the Hartinghams openly accepted from Lord Stokesleigh a thousand things which cost him nothing,—his venison, game, fruit, flowers, the superfluities of his dozens of manors and thousands a-year,—it was taken for granted that his purse lay as open to them as his conservatories and preserves: an opinion somewhat owing to the equivocal smile with which his Lordship himself denied the soft impeachment. For he had not sufficient generosity to keep guard over the reputation of the woman, in the liveliness of whose society and perfumed atmosphere of whose charms, his sensual egotism chose to recreate itself, rather than be at the trouble of providing itself with a cheerful fireside.

The half-dozen Ladies Hartley, now as brown and shrivelled as a bunch of morels, who divided their time between stitching for charity fairs and missionary bazaars, and ripping up the reputation of their neighbors, were never weary of inveighing against the shameless conduct of the Hartinghams, in living upon Lord Stokesleigh for months and months in his country-house: such being the numerical precision with which the baby-faced old lord, their brother, rendered his account of

a single visit of ten days, for battue-shooting! It is true Lord Hartley had to revenge himself upon Helen for Blanche's rejection of his hand, which he had travelled down into Suffolk by the mail, attired in Angola gloves and a comfortable, to offer to her acceptance; not, however, till he had satisfactorily assured himself that she was in possession of what the advertisements call a genteel competence, and that her elder sister had no prospect of a son.

Of the life pursued by Blanche herself, in the interval, needs it to say more than that it was one of blamelessness, usefulness, and peace. Of her, it might be truly observed, in a sense far different from that in which the words were uttered by Byron, that

> She lived not in herself,—but she became
> Portion of that around her!

The only drawback on her satisfaction, (besides the uneasiness produced by Helen's precarious modes of life,) arose from the obstinacy with which her father refused to visit Doesbury, or place himself within view of Downham Hall:—Lady Downham, who knew herself to be detested in her old neighborhood, having prompted Sir George to declare, that he would never return to a spot the source of all his degradation, till he was carried to the family vault!

"We can't alter his determination, my dear; for as I've often said before about him, a wilful man must have his way," was the comment of poor mortified old Probyn Watts. "The fact is, that, ascribe what motives you may for his resolution, Sir George don't care to be an eye-witness to all the good the Effervilles have been doing in his house and land!"

"You can scarcely expect of poor papa, dear Mr. Watts, that he could find much pleasure in surveying Lord Efferville's triumphs!" pleaded Blanche. "Reflect what painful reminiscences the scene must recall to him!"

"I do,—I do, my dear child. Lord love you! I'd forgive him with my whole heart, and never trouble him with the name of Doesbury again, if it wasn't for poor Jack. But knowing how that dear fellow goes slaving on the whole year round in Lon'on, only to make him worthy of you, Blanche, and his sole chance of the happiness of seeing you during the short holidays he gives himself on his way to the circuit,—you must own 'tis hard indeed, that not a soul of you will come and help me welcome the poor boy,—you must own 'tis hard!"

"He must come over to Southwold and visit *us*."

"Ay, ay! won't he, I should just like to know! Though a ride of three-and-twenty miles is a hard beginning to a day's courtship, he'll be here I warrant him before the sun's risen twice on him under his father's roof. But what's that, my dear girl, what's a day's visit,—a saunter on the sea-shore with you and Lou., and may be your father talking London politics to him all the time,—when as soon as dinner's over, there are those confounded twenty-three miles back again!—That little skinflint of a stepmother of yours would see him bogged, or waylaid, or drowned in a ditch, sooner than offer him a bed at the cottage!"

"We must not be too hard on Lady Downham's lack of hospitality," said the ever-charitable Blanche. "It is not her fault that the means are wanting. We have no spare bed. When Lord Hartley was here, he slept at the inn."

"Lord Hartley! The fellow might have slept in the oyster-bed, and 'twould have done *him* no harm, though his presence might have frozen the poor fish. But I'll tell you what, Blanche, darling, next summer, before my son makes his usual visit, I'll propose a little excursion to your father. We'll go and see Houghton and Holkham, and a grand country-seat or two. Though Sir George knows them by heart, he can't refuse to afford a little pleasure to you and Lou.; and so, he'll run no risk of vexation from Lord Efferville's handsome face, or the neatness of the Downham farms. I'll take you all over in my old barouche and my four new bays;—and—and—. But I'll not tell you the rest of my scheme, Blanche. For as little missish as you are, my dear, you might perhaps take it into your head to induce your father again to say 'no!'"

His plan was of course to afford a place of rendezvous to his son, where he might enjoy a few days of uninterrupted intercourse with the object of his boyhood's idolatry,—his manhood's stedfast attachment; and make manifest to her the improvement which time and study, and extended experience of the world, had effected in her rustic Cymon.—For Jack had friendships to boast of, and distinctions to cite, such as must suffice to convince her of his merit, by his just appreciation among public men. He was on the point, too, of getting into parliament;—thanks to the helping hand of one of the first peers of the realm, who, pledged heart and fortune to the support of the cause which Blanche regarded as that of the Church and State, considered that he could not provide it with a more zealous or efficient champion than the man whom Lady Hartingham, because she did not see him at balls or drawing-rooms, still stigmatized as a Suffolk boor.

The party took place; Sir George being as well content to escape for a few days from the perpetual thrift and thraldom of the home which Martha loved to convert into a union workhouse. And so well did the plan prosper, and so forbearing was the weather (on such occasions usually remorseless), that there was much ado to persuade old Pro. that the *encore* with which he honored his own performance should not take place at Christmas time, without a leaf on the trees to shelter the sauntering of the young couple. And when at length persuaded to postpone it till the following midsummer, when their tour might extend itself into a neighboring shire, not even the young templar himself found the intervening twelve months so much resembling twenty-four, as his sanguine and impatient sire.

In the interim, however, short or long as it might be, the adored son of Doesbury Lodge, and adoring lover of Blanche, had accomplished what it sometimes requires the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of lives to achieve: he had made himself a name! Ay, aided only by his own abilities, he had made himself a name! His maiden speech was printed, and the vulgar patronymic so abhorrent to the delicate ears of Lady Hartingham, was placarded in capitals at the news-venders' shops, to secure the sale of a third edition. Whether he were John Probyn Watts, Esq., or John Watts Probyn, mattered no longer. He had accomplished that first step on the high road to the Temple of Fame, which, like the *premier pas* taken by St. Denis with his head under his arm, *est le soeuel qui coute.*

The best of it was that, even when this first grand step was achieved, undismayed by the prospect of having to work up to one of those fanciful reputations which the public every now and then takes delight in conferring, as an university its honorary degrees,—sometimes to mortify a political rival, sometimes in a fit of maniacal enthusiasm,—his courage rose with the occasion; and he resolved to earn by double exertion his gratuitous laurels. Shrinking, moreover, from the glare of a too sudden renown, his modesty bespoke favor for him; and if at the commencement of the Session the new speaker was admired, before the close of it he was esteemed.

Young Watts was in fact the creature of a crisis. A strong party, lacking a mouthpiece to proclaim its program, availed themselves of an orator whose forensic reputation had preceded him in the House; and as his prospects in life were sufficiently good to enable him to dispense with professional drudgery, now that it had accomplished the object of his foreseeing mother by forming his mind to habits of business, he was able to direct his unencumbered thoughts towards political life, which most lawyers are forced to treat as supplemental.

"Beware!—Be not too much elated!" still remonstrated the ever-prudential mother to her triumphant husband.—"Remember the adage, that 'those who go up like the rocket, come down like the stick.'—My son must work, and he must refrain, ere the foundations he has lain will support a structure worthy to be seen above ground."

She would not hear of his renouncing his profession.—*She* would not hear of his giving up the circuit.—The discipline of public life had not done half its duty. When Christmas came again, accordingly the same grievances were renewed;—and the same patience was enforced upon the now really indignant young man. But on reminding them that his midsummer pleasures would be abrogated the following summer by the duties of the session, he at length obtained a promise, that, by way of compensation, they would make an expedition to the lakes with him early in the autumn.

In the course of that tour, a triumph far greater than his senatorial honors was achieved by the Phœnix of old Pro.:—he obtained from the beautiful recluse of Southwold an avowal of the deep interest she had long felt in his career.

Still, he did not extort from her any immediate hope of being his wife. Even had their fortunes admitted of a London establishment such as his parliamentary duties required, she would not quit her father;—though the plebeian John Watts, emulating the generosity of her patrician brother-in-law, offered to leave her whole property to the enjoyment of Sir George.

"It is not alone an income he would lose in losing me," was her frank reply. "For years past, I have been his sole companion, his only friend. Lady Downham's nature is so cold, and since such evil consequences followed her evil counsels, she has so shrivelled up into reserve that my father might as well live with a stone statue or a withered tree!"

"He took her for better for worse. He ought to abide by the worst!" pleaded the young logician. "No man can exact that his daughter should remain single, because he has chosen to give her an unworthy step-mother."

"He exacts nothing,—he expects nothing. In such a case, it is the business of the daughter to spare the pain of an unjust requirement. And I shall think less well of you, if you render my duty more difficult, or create on my father's part a painful sense of obligation."

Thus was the poor barrister's special pleading over-ruled.

Forced to compliance, the life of the aspiring lover was one comprising the exercise of such anxious and varied duties, that he was almost surprised to find the months pass away between absence and absence,—(a correspondence being now established betwen him and his future wife,) as unperceived as the flowing of those streams to which that of time is so often likened.—As to Blanche, *her* days became gradually brighter and brighter, so as to fill up the measure of her joy. The whole family was now completely acclimatized at Southwold. They were no longer conscious of the privations which, to their first experience, had been so galling.

Their comforts had been greatly enhanced by the watchful providence of old Pro. An occasion having presented itself for the purchase of the house they inhabited, he not only assisted Blanche to make it her own by the still more advantageous sale of an unprofitable lot of land belonging to her portion of her mother's estate, but contrived to worm out of Lady Downham a sufficient portion of their layings by, to convert it into a commodious habitation. During their tour to the lakes, that careful matron remained behind to take care that the carpenters converted neither chips nor shavings to their own use; and though the small green-house which, at the suggestion of Pro. Watts! was added to their sitting-room, was a sad eye-sore to her penurious view, yet as the Watt-es undertook to fill it from their conservatory at the Lodge, she forbore to remonstrate.

Already, even previous to calling the place her own, Blanche had converted the little platform of greensward and Portugal laurels into

a pretty flower-garden, hedged with rosemary and tamarisks, which never flourish better than when sprinkled with a sea-spray; and it was the admiration of those who had hitherto regarded the spot as under the ban of barrenness, that Miss Downham's fuchsias and magnolias defied even the winter atmosphere of theSuffolk coast. That garden, small as it was, had become an object of the greatest interest to her; for on summer evenings, Louisa, when too tired for further exercise, could sit there sheltered from view by the evergreens, in a little thicket of flowers, enjoying the sea-breezes.

It was there those London letters were spelled over and dwelt upon, every line of which, pregnant with thought and feeling, tended to soften or refine the heart which responded to the higher chords of the writer's noble soul. It was there that Lady Hartingham's far livelier epistles were read again and again: the affectionate sister to whom they were addressed, trembling lest the wit which glanced like summer lightning through their pages, might be only too surely indicative that a storm was raging at no great distance.

For some time indeed, nay, for more than a year previous to the epoch we have been describing as having imprinted furrows on so many brows, Helen had almost ceased to write. She and her husband were in Paris, where the Hartleys were also settled, drinking the lees of a troubled life; and Blanche knew not whether to attribute her sister's relaxed intercourse to the cares of an uncertain mode of life, or to the pleasures and pastimes of a city whose chief business is amusement. Like all hopeful people,—and the good are ever hopeful,—she tried to believe that "no news was good news." But there are moments when the brightest spirits, like the brightest sky, become overcast; and in those, she could not but call to mind what her "glorious John" had often told her,—that Lord Hartingham ceased to enjoy at Paris the privileges, of an English peer, and that his liabilities, if transferred to foreign holders, might at any moment convey him to a foreign prison!

It was almost the only word ever breathed to her by her betrothed which Blanche could have wished unsaid; for whenever the wind howled, or whenever Lady Downham had been droning one of her dreary chapters of lamentations, it recurred to her ears and heart. At such moments, she would sit down and address a few lines to her dearest Helen, imploring her to write, and set their anxieties at ease; telling her that her father's health was broken, and that his shaken nerves could ill abide suspense. But when the letter was written whither was it to be despatched?

At length the idea occurred to Blanche that her sister, who had borne no child since her unlucky confinement in Eaton Place, might be again about to become a mother; and that she wished to surprise them with the event when her danger was past.

But Louisa shook her head. It was so little like Helen to study the comfort of other people! She, who had not forgotten poor Blanche's hurried midnight journey, scarcely thought it likely that Lady Hartingham would thus studiously abstain from exciting their uneasiness.

She would not wound her own dear Blanche's feelings by communicating her suspicions. But she was firmly convinced that, having nothing to obtain from them, and caring nothing about them, Southwold and its little colony had altogether glided from the thoughts of the brilliant Diamond,—no longer of Downham Hall!

CHAPTER XXI.

In the dismay of her heart, Blanche at length applied to John Watts to endeavor to obtain intelligence of the wanderers.

A week, nearly ten days, elapsed without bringing a reply to her inquiries. And when it came, Blanche almost wished she had never made the appeal. The letter ran as follows:—

"My dearest Blanche has often vexed me by rejecting my offers of service. Yet such is the perversity of human nature, that I would fain have declined the only commission with which she ever yet honored me. There seems nothing very responsible in having to inquire on your account, where the Hartinghams are living, and how they are faring. Yet for the life of me, I could not help feeling, when I called in the aid necessary to ascertain these facts, as if playing the sorry part of a spy!

"I feel still more uncomfortable now, for I have nothing, darling, but ill news to communicate. Yes, dear Blanche, I heartily wish you had never given me the commission! I am even puzzled in what terms to write to you upon this subject with the perfect candor and openheartedness which, on every other, subsists between us. For, thanks be to heaven, my Blanche, your ears have never been cheated into confusion of right and wrong by the specious names assigned by society to the vices it favors, and the follies which afford it diversion. You will be shocked, therefore, at things which would scarcely cause ninety-nine out of a hundred of those among whom I am living, to raise an eyebrow. But you will be more than shocked—you will be deeply, deeply grieved—and how can I bear to give you pain?

"The Hartinghams are in Paris; living foolishly, and I fear I must add, wickedly. Not according to the estimation of the rag dolls and statuettes of bronze, the shreds and patches of fashionable frivolity, the snippings of all that is false and vicious, of which their society is composed. No! *there* they pass for gay, brilliant, fascinating—fit ornaments of a congenial circle. Lady Hartingham's beauty and *bon-mots* are universally quoted; and Lord Hartingham passes for an agreeable off-hand man of the world. They are stars, in short, in one of the most corrupt phases of society that ever owed its unnatural lustre to the decaying nature of the fabric.

"They have no children—they are expecting none: the worse for *her*, for a child is often

an element of regeneration to such a woman as your sister.

"The state of their affairs is, I fear, still more disordered than that of their conduct. Hartingham plays like a madman: but that you have owned to me, dearest Blanche, the hold he once possessed over your affections, I should add, and like a rogue, for he loses beyond his means of payment. For a long time, he obtained money at a ruinous per centage; for, though an English reversionary interest is usually less available on the Continent than at home, persons have been found to attest the sterling value of your sister's prospects. But the golden vein is now exhausted: he has had frightful difficulties to contend with; and this, I fear, must account for the cessation of Lady Hartingham's correspondence.

"I was thinking of ending my communication at this point. But, after all, why withhold from the life of my life one thought, or fear, or feeling? My 'rock of alabaster piled up to the clouds,' is too strong on its foundations for any paltry prudery. To dismiss a disagreeable subject, then, as briefly as possible, there is a certain Lord Stokesleigh in the case, too much the friend of Hartingham to be a friend to Helen; too much an admirer of Helen to be to Hartingham a genuine friend. It is from that quarter I apprehend dangers for your sister, such as even your affection could neither avert nor palliate. I have caused a watch to be set over her; and when I have heard more, will explicitly point out in what way your further reprehensions might be available. Farewell, then, my own precious friend—sister—wife,—companion for this world and the next!—For the sake of your father and Lou. (your children, as I often call them!) do not let what I have communicated prey too deeply upon your spirits.

"J. P.W."

That this charge was given in vain, who can doubt! Harassed by duns and difficulties, Blanche had already beheld her sister. But, exposed to the hungry jaws of libertinism, neglected by her husband for the gaming table, poor, lonely, and subjected to the soothing of a bosom friend so dangerous as Lord Stokesleigh, was a position that filled her with consternation. The tranquil life apportioned by Providence to herself, had never seemed a gift to be so grateful for as at that moment. The more reason, a thousand times the more reason, why she should disquiet herself for the sake of that beloved and beautiful sister, who was traversing the bridge of a single thread, suspended over the fiery flood?

The hesitation, moreover, with which her betrothed addressed her on the subject,—*he*, usually so unflinching in his denunciations,—inspired her with the deepest anxiety; and lo! her heart yearned towards Helen, as often in former years towards Louisa, when she was about to be subjected to some perilous mode of cure.

One day that dear Louisa burst into her room with a letter bearing the Paris post-mark; and, as she retreated again to be no restraint upon her sister while perusing it, the anxious girl had the satisfaction to hear her exclaim, "from Helen herself, thank heaven!" For so shabby was the aspect of the letter, and so irregular the handwriting, that neither of them had at first recognised it as their sister's!

On perusal of Lady Hartingham's letter, poor Blanche renewed her ejaculation of "Heaven be thanked!". That she did so, would have surprised many, had the contents transpired. For it was written in the depth of distress, and written, therefore, with twice the unction ever before exhibited by the selfish Helen. Her husband was on the eve of arrest, preserved for a time only, by strict concealment; and she herself, having already disposed of her jewels and personal effects, was exposed to the heaviest privations. "I thought of sending over Walmsley to you some time ago, Blanche," wrote Lady Hartingham, "that you might learn from *her* details of my miseries which I do not choose to commit to paper. But, alas! when the time came for despatching her, the funds for her journey were not forthcoming.

"And now, Blanche, of my wants,—wants from which *you* only can relieve me! To no one else dare I incur such a weight of obligation. Nothing short of a thousand pounds will free us from our present extremity. A smaller sum would prevent us from starving,—would (to use a phrase we have for years used to our cost) enable us to keep our heads above water. But it would not cut short the root of the evil. It would not enable us to quit this place and its influences. To become other than we are, every claim here must be paid, every connection renounced, every folly repented. We must escape from Colonel Hartley's evil counsels to his son; and the peevish whining of Lady Mary, which makes me fly to any other means of amusement as a resource. Once thoroughly emancipated, we might settle in some quiet country village—one of those green nooks among the forests of Normandy, which, on our way to the coast, have so often charmed me; where Hart. would find in country sports the excitement he has been tempted to seek in less harmless sources. So situated, we might again be happy. So situated, we might again *deserve* to be happy.

"But where are we to look for a thousand pounds? a large sum, even in a wealthy family; and in our doubly bankrupt tribe, a fortune! My only hope, Blanche, as I said before, is in *you;* and to *you* I can appeal with less shame, because you *know* that I shall be able eventually to discharge the obligation.

"That the fortune, my share of which has been wantonly squandered, is no more than necessary for the support of the family at Southwold, I am well aware. But I know you too well, Blanche, not to feel certain that, if any possibility exist of raising the money, you will consider the happiness and respectability of those you love far better, secured by redeeming me from my present wretchedness, than by any improvement of household comfort.

"Help me, sister, for the sake of our mother—for *my* sake—for your own;—help me, help me! Do not drive me to seek assistance of my enemies, while one of my surviving kindred can rescue me out of danger and misery! Mr.

Harman, the Ipswich banker, will advise and assist you. But if, instead of seeking him, you consult Lady Downham, or those odious Watts's, I am lost!"

Such was the communication that elicited a cry of joy from the heart of Blanche Downham, as proving that the forked tongue of the world had been, as usual, darting its venom at the innocent. For if the lord of idle thousands and tens of thousands were, as supposed, in her sister's confidence, *was* it likely that she would turn to Southwold for pecuniary aid?

Notwithstanding the prohibition it contained, Blanche had not been in receipt of the letter an hour, before she was in a post-chaise on her road to Doesbury. Not a minute was to be lost. She must see her good old friend before post time.

Blanche was of opinion, indeed, that she had no longer a right to have reserves from those "odious Watts's," especially on pecuniary matters; and even Helen might have thought so too, had she been aware of the formal engagement subsisting between her sister and John. But independent of her sense of Pro. Watts's right to be informed of her proceedings, she looked to him alone for assistance in her present strait.

"My poor father has been ailing lately," said she, after a frank exposal of her situation. "I am afraid to say a single word to him that might bring on, by agitation, one of those fits of the gout from which he used to suffer so severely, at Downham. But you, dear sir—my second father—will allow me to open my whole heart. This money,—this thousand pounds,—I *must* procure! Do not shake your head: this money I *must* procure! Will you be my negociator? Will you preserve me from what I so greatly dread, as conferences with money-lenders and usurers? I ask you without ceremony,—you who have so undeviatingly proved yourself my friend,—to hasten up to London and determine with your son how the money is to be procured."

"*That* I could settle, my dear child, without so much as quitting this room," cried the squire; "for it shall come out of my own strong box, if it come at all. I've always a trifle lying by me, Blanche, for a broken leg. I needn't tell you that, from the time John was as high as this table, he has been the sole object in life to me and his good mother. Out of our couple of thousands a-year, it has been a pleasure to lay aside half for our whelp; and what was left of this stint, after affording him the best of educations, was always invested for his benefit. Since he grew to man's estate, he has enjoyed five hundred of the thousand by way of allowance, and t'other five hundred will be *his* as soon as he can persuade a certain obstinate jade, who shall be nameless, to share it with him. But in the interim, my dear, we look upon the savings as his, and upon what's his as yours. So that you see, my own little Pearl, there are more thousands than the one you're in want of, lying by for you in the Bury bank. Only, my dear Blanche, I feel bound to take better care of your property than you seem disposed to take care of it yourself; and I tell you fairly, that 'twould vex me to see your substance wasted (whether produced by mine and my wife's economy, or by your landed inheritance) on spendthrifts and gamblers."

"*On a sister*, dear sir!" interrupted Blanche. "That name supersedes all others."

"Not a bit of it! if, as I verily believe, all the money you could expend on these people, and a thousand times as much more, might as well be thrown, like so much rubbish, into the Eldin mine we visited last summer. Nothing more will ever be heard on't, Pearl, nor a soul living be the better."

"*I* shall be the better," pleaded Blanche; "for to my dying day, I shall feel that I did my utmost to save my poor sister from destruction!——"

"That's something, I grant!" rejoined the old man. "But it costs dear at a thousand pounds, which you may have a dozen children some day or other to teach you the value of."

"In short, then," said Blanche, impatiently, for she dreaded that the post hour might arrive without enabling her to despatch a word of comfort to her sister,—"in short, I must retrace my steps, and see what an application to Mr. Harman will do for me! I shall, probably, have no difficulty in effecting a mortgage on the Holm grass farm."

"That's the unkindest word, Pearl, I ever heard from your lips!" interrupted old Pro. "But I forgive you. Your sister's cares have worried you. No, my girl, you need not apply to Mr. Harman! But you must let me have a talk with John about what concerns you both. I will start by the mail to-night."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Blanche, certain that to procure the assent of her *fiance*, a word from *her* would suffice. "Only promise, dearest sir, to convey a few lines from me in addition to your own arguments?"

"With all my heart!"

"Then I am satisfied: then my sister's cause is safe!" was Blanche's mental rejoinder; and in less than a quarter of an hour, the letter was signed, sealed, and delivered to the friendly old squire.

CHAPTER XXIV.

While Blanche was submitting to be lectured by Lady Downham, the following morning, for having ventured to absent herself from home half the day "when she knew that her absence would cause such poignant anxiety to father," and to be reproached still more severely with the four or five pounds she must have wasted on post-horses to Doesbury and back, for no possible purpose, Pro. Watts was what he called arguing the matter over with his son; that is, receiving his son's instructions to forward the money to Paris, without loss of time, by the hands of his London banker. A few lines addressed to him by Blanche, enclosing her sister's letter, had at once decided the question.

"I have a bad opinion of Lady Hartingham," said he, in reply to his father's catechization.

"From her childhood, she has been the same brilliant, heartless, selfish being; always encroaching on her sister's rights, and imposing on her affection. I doubt whether she will ever come to good. Few women fall to the depth of folly she has reached, without sinking to a lower deep. But be she good, bad, or indifferent, sir, for the sake of Blanche's happiness, this sacrifice must be made!"

And made it was. That very night the money was despatched to Paris, and the squire back to Suffolk.

"I have made the arrangements you desire, my dearest Blanche," said a letter from glorious John, of which he was the bearer, "but on a condition which I have undertaken in your name, as you would have done for yourself, had you been present at our conference, viz., that if the relief now afforded fail in its promised effect of extricating the H.'s from their embarrassments, you will make no further cession of your property.

"I will not comfort you by saying that I believe your resolution will not be tried. The vice of gambling is hydra-headed; and now that the delicacy or pride which so long prevented your sister from becoming a beggar, has been once laid aside, she will ask again and again. I do not like her letter. The threat she tacitly holds out of applying to Stokesleigh in case you refuse, is the counterpart of the gambler's expedient of threatening suicide, unless his friends consent to ruin themselves in his place. No, decidedly, I do not like her letter!

"But yours, dearest, I like—as I like everything you write, say, think, or do;—as I have proved on the present occasion in opposition to my own convictions, by implicit obedience."

Who now so happy or so grateful as Blanche—her sister so speedily relieved—her father secured from alarm! Sir George and Lady Downham, completely in the dark, could by no means account for the unusual buoyancy of her spirits.

"Something has occurred," mused Martha, "to expedite the period of her marriage; a pleasant day of reckoning for *us*. Young Watts has certainly experienced some stroke of good fortune. I have observed lately a remarkable rise in foreign securities!"

Her father judged her better.

"Some occasion has presented itself," was *his* reflection, "for the fulfilment of a new duty. Dear Blanche has been doing some good action."

Meanwhile, till she heard again from her sister, Miss Downham did not venture to name her to Sir George. She was too afraid of exposing herself to cross-questioning where there was so much to be concealed, to risk a mass of indispensable evasions. Louisa, who was now strong enough to accompany her by sea and land, in her walks and boatings, was astonished at her sudden activity.

"That expedition to Doesbury, dear Blanche, seems to have broken the spell of your sedentary habits!" said she, with a fond and unsuspecting smile, on finding their daily excursions prolonged to double their extent.

One morning they had risen early for bathing, and were to make a circuit before returning home, to procure from a neighboring farm some fruit for Sir George's breakfast. The weather being sultry, Blanche would fain have persuaded her more delicate sister to let her proceed alone. But Louisa, too fond of her company to apprehend fatigue, persisted; nor, even when they found themselves near home again, with the urchin who was carrying their basket of strawberries lagging behind and panting at every turn, could she be persuaded to own that she was tired.

"Let us push on, dear Blanche," said she. "The post will have come in during our absence. We may perhaps find letters from Paris."

This was a sufficient spur; and when they came in sight of the cottage, half hidden in honeysuckles and musk-roses, like a hedge-sparrow's nest in hawthorns, it seemed likely to be realized; for a servant at the gate was anxiously looking out for them.

"It seems a bad thing to be so systematically punctual, Blanche," said Louisa, who was now leaning on her arm. "Half an hour too late, you see, puts the whole house into a state of consternation!"

For consternation was indeed depicted in the face of the young woman awaiting them. As they drew near, they saw that she was in tears.

"Something must have occurred!—Something terrible must be the matter!"—burst from the lips of the girls, as they hurried to the door.

To the mind of Blanche, ill news from Paris was naturally the first idea that presented itself. But her attendant, though expressly stationed at the door to break the news to Sir George's daughters, burst out abruptly with the truth.

"Her master had undergone a paralytic stroke! Dr. Maidstone had vainly attempted to bleed him. The Doctor gave little hope!"

In a moment his children were in his chamber; where the shock they had received did not serve to deaden the anguish of finding their father extended senseless on his bed—his eyes fixed—his face distorted. No one was with him. One of the terrified servants had accompanied the surgeon home to bring back sinapisms for his feet; while the thrifty Lady Downham had already betaken herself to the adjoining dressing-room, where she was occupied in locking up the numerous drawers of a bureau in which her husband kept his papers. The sufferer was deserted, as though life were already extinct!

But the girls could not be so easily discouraged. While Louisa called louldy for assistance, Blanche proceeded to apply powerful aromatics. Nature, however, was inflexible. The glassy eye still remained open and stony. The froth issuing from the half-open lips, continued to flow.

Another minute, and Dr. Maidstone returned, confirming his previous judgment. He had never witnessed the recovery of a patient so powerfully affected. The usual remedies had been administered: and he had little hope that Sir George would live through the day.

While he proceeded to apply blisters and

cautics, Blanche and her sister withdrew to question Lady Downham; who, exhibiting even more than her customary reserve, seemed to regard them rather as antagonists to be distanced, than daughters awaiting in anguish the last agony of their father.

"How can I possibly surmise the cause of the attack!" was her peevish reply. "For such explanations, you should apply to Dr. Maidstone. At Sir George's age, apoplexy is by no means uncommon."

"Still he was so well last night!" pleaded Blanche.

"So well and so cheerful," added her sister. "He kissed me and thanked me, when I brought him his candle. Yes! thank God he kissed me;—for I shall, perhaps, never, never hear the voice of my poor father again!"

Lady Downham stood by, with an air rather sullen than afflicted; and during the anxious hours that ensued before the effect of the remedies could be ascertained, a sort of surly consciousness seemed to keep her silent. When informed that the stupor was unabated, and the pulse still imperceptible, she replied like one who, from the first, has entertained no shadow of hope.

It was not till apprized of the arrival of the good Squire from the Lodge, who had been sent for expressly by Blanche, within half an hour of learning her father's hopeless condition, that her ladyship's repressed indignation burst forth. "It was not a time," she said, "to have strangers in the house."

The word stranger was indeed ill-applied to him who had afforded to the Downham family a home, when they were houseless; and food, when they were about to lack and suffer hunger! But Blanche forbore to remonstrate with the irritated woman. And it was well that she was so considerate. For scarcely had old Pro. set foot in the house, when it was announced to Lady Downham that she was a widow!

From that moment, there was an end of her revilings and repinings; and she withdrew from the family council. Her daughter, as in duty bound, would fain have borne her company in those first moments of bereavement. But she chose to be alone.

"Leave her to herself; she had need to commune with her own spirit, and repent the evils she had caused!" said Pro. when, Louisa having lain down to rest, he found himself alone with the eldest sister, so composed and feminine even in her grief. "I want to talk to you, Pearl. I have much, *much* to say—much further grief to cause you. But it *must* be done," added he, dashing a tear from his eye. "Don't think you've heard the worst of all this, my dear! There's a deal that's bad to come!"

A wild idea glanced into the mind of Blanche that her father's fate might have been his own act and deed. Poison and not apoplexy might have brought him to the state she had witnessed!

"No, my dear, not quite so bad as that," cried the squire. "A paralytic stroke was the sole cause of death. But the stroke was brought on by the confounded folly, not to call it by a harsher name, of his detestable wife."

"The act could not have been intentional," said Blanche, firmly. "Whatever her faults, Lady Downham is incapable of deliberate wickedness."

"I don't know about *deliberate!* Bad enough, to my thinking, that she induced your father to open another person's letter. An accessary before the fact is as criminal as the principal."

"But what had the opening of this letter, sir, to do with my dear father's sudden illness?"

"Everything! You don't show the curiosity I expected, Blanche! You don't seem to surmise by instinct, that the letter was addressed to *you!*"

"*To me!*"

"By your sister—by Lady Hartingham! That woman—the widow yonder—has lately, it seems, taken it into her head, that some kind of underhand mischief was carried on between Helen and yourself: something, perhaps she fancied, that might end in breaking up the establishment here, and throwing your father and her on their own resources."

"No! she *could* not have thought so!" cried Blanche, with generous warmth. "She knew that so long as my father lived, nothing would tempt me to desert them."

"Well, some such fear, I suppose, she will make the plea for her proceedings! All that is known on the subject in the house, is that, shortly after your departure this morning, the postman brought a foreign letter for Miss Downham, which, contrary to custom, her ladyship insisted on carrying into my poor friend's room; instead of having it placed in your's to await your return. The servants thought it odd, but had little time to ponder upon the matter; for, ten minutes afterwards, my lady burst shrieking out of her husband's chamber, desiring that Dr. Maidstone might be sent for."

"But the letter—the letter—my sister's letter!"

"Is in the hands of Dr. Maidstone; where, till to-morrow it must remain."

"Till to-morrow—Why? Did you not say that it was addressed to myself?"

"Certainly. Two of your servants saw the address."

"Then what right has Dr. Maidstone to detain it?"

"Because it may be called for by the coroner. In this, as in every instance of sudden death, an inquest, my dear Blanche, must be held. And as Dr. Maidstone found this letter clutched in the hand of Sir George when he was called in, it is not impossible that he may be required to produce it. Country juries, like facts, are stubborn things."

"At all events," said Blanche, in great uneasiness and agitation—foreseeing the confidential nature of her sister's communication at such a crisis—"at all events, the letter should remain in the interim, in the hands of one of the family."

"The family, or the persons nearest to

the deceased, become, on the contrary, the first objects of suspicion, in cases where there exists any idea of unfair dealing. Maidstone behaved precisely as the circumstances warranted. He sealed up the letter, with your father's signet ring, to be produced if requisite."

"How very unfortunate! How cruel! A whole day's suspense ere I can learn the contents!"

"We cannot hope, my dear, that they were of an agreeable nature; since there is too much reason to fear they caused a fatal shock to your father."

"If I were to go to Lady Downham? My entreaties might perhaps induce her to admit her knowledge of the contents of the letter!"

"I wish it were likely! What! *you* Pearl, who have been nearly twenty years acquainted with her close disposition—she who letteth not her right hand know what her left hand doeth—can you for a moment suppose that she would admit having suggested, or even participated, in so shabby an action? Mark my words! She will tell you she knows nothing about the matter: that your father, anxious about Helen, on hearing that a foreign letter had arrived, was desirous to see the handwriting: and that while she was in the adjoining room, or with her head turned away, or no matter what pretext she will invent, she heard a heavy fall upon the floor; and found your father lying there, struck with apoplexy, and grasping the letter in his hand."

"At all events, I am inclined to try. You can scarcely imagine my anxiety on my sister's account. Direful indeed, must have been the news which proved fatal to my father!"

"You can but make the attempt, my dear child," said Pro., shaking his head as his future daughter-in-law quitted the room. "But remember my prophecy, that out of that cold flinty rock, you will elicit nothing but sparks of anger."

At the close of half an hour, Blanche returned to him, with her eyes more tearful, and her cheeks paler than before. Lady Downham had fully justified the squire's prognostications. On Blanche's throwing herself at her feet, and imploring her to acquaint her with the contents of the letter, she had taken refuge in resentment, and ordered her from the room.

"What right had Miss Downham to doubt her word? What right had she to accuse her of duplicity? What right had she to torment her—*her*, a new-made widow, bending under the judgment of the Almighty—with her husband lying unburied, awaiting an inquest, within reach of the sound of their altercation!"

On the reiteration of her harsh command, her step-daughter was forced to retire. But she quitted Lady Downham's presence in such utter brokenness of heart, that anything less stony than a female miser, must have relented!—

Not an inmate of the house of mourning closed their eyes that night. It was only with Blanche, however, that, during her vigils, the interests of the family claimed the priority over her personal sorrows. On the morrow, before mid-day, the inquest was to be held; and it was essential that some explanation should take place with the medical man whose opinion was to direct the finding of the jury. But whom could she delegate to such an interview with Dr. Maidstone?—Sir George's servants were not of a confidential class.—The squire was too abrupt to be trusted. It was only herself who would undertake a task so painful.—Yes! trying as would be the interview, she determined to see him herself.

Shocked to observe the change which grief had already wrought in Miss Downham's appearance, the Southwold doctor was about to mingle with his condolences formal inquiries after her health, when Blanche, who had no time to waste in compliments, came straight to the point.

"You have a letter of mine, Dr. Maidstone,' said she;—"a letter, which you found yesterday in my poor father's room?"—

"I am in possession of a letter, Miss Downham," he replied: "to whom addressed, I can't take upon myself to say. I caused it to be sealed up, as soon as it fell into my hands; that it might be forthcoming at the melancholy inquiry which is about to take place."

"It is addressed to *me*, Sir. You may verify the fact, from the servant who received it yesterday from the postman. May I ask you, therefore, to have the kindness to deliver it to me?"—

"Impossible, my dear young lady, impossible!" rejoined the fussy doctor. "I have an imperative duty to fulfil. For the safety of a document so important, I am responsible to the court, and——"

"Indeed, indeed, you mistake the matter," interrupted Blanche, eager to cut short his lengthy exposition. "In a case of suicide you would be bound to produce every document tending to throw light upon the motives or mental disturbance of the deceased. But in the present melancholy instance, all you will have to attest, is the *cause* of death,—not the origin of that cause,—which, after all, must be conjectural. You will only have to certify to the jury, Dr. Maidstone, what, from the symptoms, it will be easy to prove: that my father died by the visitation of God. You will have to prove that, when called in, you found him laboring under symptoms of apoplectic seizure of the most fatal kind; which resisted your remedies, and in a few hours terminated his life. But unless you expressly inform the jury that you found a letter in his hand, *who* is to suggest it, who is to demand a sight of the letter;—which you are as well aware as I am, can afford no solution of the nature of his attack. He died, Dr. Maidstone, because such was the will of God!—You might expose all the secrets of the family, to our detriment, and eventually, perhaps, to your own, without arriving at any other conclusion."

Staggered by her composure, a little awed perhaps by the tone of authority she had so unexpectedly assumed, the doctor spread forth his hands and elevated his shoulders to express a

that he was doing his duty, and must not refine upon the consequences.

"It is both Mr. Watts's opinion and mine, Sir," said she, firmly, "that you are doing more than your duty. But you are perhaps uncertain as to the cause of death?"—

"Not in the slightest degree, Miss Downham; not in the slightest degree!—The meanest tyro in medical science could not be mistaken."

"Then what more do you require?—Would you suggest doubts or uncertainties that you do not feel?"—

"Certainly not, my dear Miss Downham; and God forbid that my over-tenacious conscientiousness should be the origin of vexation to the family.—Still, duty is duty—"

"And excess of zeal as great a fault as lukewarmness!" rejoined Blanche, firmly. "It is clear that this letter does not bear upon the question of my father's attack. Even if you were satisfied and could prove that the perusal of it was the exciting cause of his paralytic seizure, in what way could the sight of the letter actuate the finding of the jury?—The verdict must *still* be 'Died by the visitation of God.' The means by which that visitation was brought about, are not a matter for human scrutiny."

"Then why, Madam, if I may veutnre to inquire," pleaded the Esculapius, a little nettled, "are you so anxious to obtain possession of the letter?"—

"Because it is mine, and you have no pretence for withholding it; and still more, because it refers to private and confidential affairs, which it would give me great pain, and cause great displeasure to my brother-in-law, Lord Hartingham, who will probably make Downham Hall his residence, to have bruited through the county."

Dr. Maidstone was puzzled. He thought himself acting under a sense of duty. But the fear of displeasing a lord—a lord likely to reside within reach of the benefits of Southwold bathing and his own magnesia,—was a weighty counterpoise: and Dr. Maidstone was a man accustomed in his vocation, to the use of scales and weights.

"Disposed as I am to make every sacrifice to your comfort, my dear Miss Downham," said he blandly, after a plausible pause, "I will certainly give up this unfortunate letter; on condition that you pledge me your word it shall be forthcoming, if required by the coroner or jury?"

"To which I cheerfully accede!" rejoined Blanche, "on condition, Dr. Maidstone, that you pledge me *yours* to volunteer no allusion to the letter, in giving your evidence."

Again, the doctor demurred. But in the end, the mild self-possession of Blanche obtained the mastery. And lo! the fatal document was drawn from his pocket-book and placed at her disposal.

But with the excitement of suspense, evaporated all her courage; and when, at length, the bereaved daughter found herself alone in her chamber with the letter in her hand,—the hateful letter which had conveyed death to her father,—so deadly a faintness came over her, that she had scarcely strength to break the seal; bearing as it did the impression of the signet so familiar to her eyes, which was henceforth to be used no more!

The trembling girl dreaded to make herself mistress of the contents. Yet, grievous as were her anticipations, they did not attain half the extent of evil disclosed by perusal.

"Make no further sacrifices for us, Blanche!" wrote Lady Hartingham. "Think no more of us,—feel no more for us. We are unworthy your care! You would bring down ruin upon yourself, without rescuing us from the abyss. Within an hour of my receiving that sum to procure which has cost you, my dear sister, several years of impoverishment, it was wantonly thrown away. Instead of being applied to the purposes for which I asked it with such abject prayers,—it was wasted at the hazard table. What will now become of me, I know not!—My husband is in prison!—Oh! Blanche—we were born to the comforts, the luxuries of life. And by the cruel selfishness of my father and husband, to what are we not reduced!—God bless you, my dearest Blanche. Be happy as you deserve, undisturbed by thoughts of your distracted sister, H. H."

Such was the letter which had struck a death blow to the heart of Sir George Downham!—and poor Blanche, but that she was hourly expecting the arrival of John Watts from town, whither a special messenger had been despatched to apprize him of their loss, would have scarcely nerved herself to bear up against her increasing grief. Wise in her generation, she knew that it was to the stronger sex she must look for counsel, aid, and protection; and it was a comfort unspeakable to feel that he to whose guidance her future life was to be submitted, would soon be there;—sustaining her by his strength of intellect,—solacing her by his softness of heart.

When the jury arrived, composed of Southwold tradespeople, who, rarely admitted to the cottage, were not sorry to satiate their curiosity, John Watts had not yet made his appearance: and as the tramp and scuffling of so many feet became audible in the chamber of death,—by prescriptive right the stillest of all human sojourns,—even while weeping bitterly at the profanation, she could not help feeling that though unable to resist the intrusion, her betrothed would have kept silence where silence was due, and restricted the officious prying of strangers.

Even when that trial was at an end, and she heard from the Squire the verdict, foreseen from the first, of "NATURAL DEATH," which certified that no publicity would attach itself to the fatal letter, she could not dismiss the consciousness that the relief would have been greater, had *he* been bearer of the intelligence.

Yet when he came, her heart was doomed to disappointment. Though full of deferential sympathy with her grief, his plain good sense could not be tempted into exaggerated demonstrations of sorrow. As the father of his Blanche—a father tardily but tenderly alive to her merits—he sincerely regretted Sir George. But as the deceased had nearly attained the

three-score years, his sudden end could not be regarded as untimely. And as the event removed the last obstacle to the union of the young Member with the object of his fondest attachment, the only marvel was, that genuine tears swam in his eyes as he approached to take a last leave of the dead; and that his voice trembled with emotion, while inquiring into the particulars of his last moments.

"And now, my own dearest Blanche," pleaded he, after witnessing for some time in silence her filial distress, "and *now*, we part no more! No further pretext, darling, for delaying our happiness! You have fulfilled to the utmost your pious mission. Lady Downham, as your father once told us, has a jointure of a thousand a-year on the Downham estate; and Louisa will share with yourself the ten thousand pounds apportioned by Sir Jeremiah's will to his younger grandchildren; so that there is as little call upon your generosity as claim upon your kindness. A new home, my own Blanche, awaits you.—Henceforward we part no more!"

"We must!" was her firm reply. "If you would prove to me the steadfastness of your affection, you must start for London, within an hour!"

"*That* you cannot exact!" remonstrated the young man. "In the absence of Lord Hartingham, it is my duty to officiate as chief mourner at the melancholy ceremony of your father's interment."

"Not if you truly love me!"—faltered Blanche. "Not if you wish to serve me in a more important way than by mere outward tokens of respect. Your father will tell you, John, that this sad catastrophe was brought about by the perusal of a foreign letter,—a letter which Lady Downham's paltry inquisitiveness betrayed into her husband's hands. But even your father knows not and must never know the contents. Read it! and judge how much my unfortunate sister stands in need of a friend."

After reading it, it is possible that John Watts may have thought, in the depths of his soul, that she stood far more in need of what his accomplished friend Mrs. Euphemia Primwell would have called, a little wholesome castigation. But he uttered nothing beyond a peevish interjection or two, while perusing the letter. He had probably some foretaste of the hateful journey awaiting him.

"You must hasten to Paris, John," resumed Blanche, as if interpreting the furrows of his ruffled brow. "You must save these wretched people from ruin!——"

An expressive shake of the head seemed to signify the infructuousness of his best endeavors.

"From ruin and disgrace! My sister has now succeeded to a noble fortune——"

"But embarrassed by her folly, to an extent no one can surmise."

"And should she be debarred by want of present means, and Hartingham's miserable position; from coming over to attend my father's funeral, and assume the administration of his affairs, their credit would receive a blow from which no future effort could redeem it."

"As they richly deserve!"

"Too true! But, if *I* deserve any kindness at your hands, John, for *my* sake overlook their faults! Do not force me to bring selfish arguments into play. Do not force me to remind you that for the future, whatever discredit attaches to the owner of Downham Hall, will reflect also upon us and ours."

The words "us and ours," from the lips of his idolized Blanche, carried a charm with them that was all-convincing. His heart became softened to the tenderest consistency.

"Yes—he would go! It was hard—but he would go! He would see what could be effected for their extrication and return to England. His knowledge of business might, he admitted, be of service in the regulation of their affairs. *He* understood better than they, how to deal with the rascals who had been preying upon them!"

If Blanche had *repeated* the words, "us and ours," he would perhaps have proposed starting at that very moment!

"Under the peculiar circumstances of the case, Harman will give me such a letter to his Paris correspondent," resumed John Watts, "as will enable me to bring them off. Harman knows he will have to raise on the estate your portion of five thousand pounds; and on my making myself responsible to him in that amount, will, I am certain, assist me."

"Thanks!—thanks!—a thousand thanks!" exclaimed the grateful girl, surrendering her hand to be kissed *ad libitum*. "Save my sister for me, John!—save my poor dear Helen—and you will have a three-fold claim on my affection!"

"If anything could reconcile me to leaving you at such a moment," he rejoined, after a melancholy re-consideration of the case and of her gentle countenance, "it would be that my father has established himself yonder at the hotel, to watch over you, till you permit him to remove you to the shelter of his own roof."

"And poor Lou.——"

"Will accompany you, of course, as before. Nay, even Lady Overreach herself, if you feel that you should be the happier for her company. But all such questions, darling Blanche, I leave to your own discretion. And as I must start in an hour, let us hasten to make the best explanation we can to my father, touching the necessity for this vexatious journey."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Astonishing the simplification that may be introduced into the most entangled affairs, by one whose shrewd eye and practised hand are accustomed to the despatch of business!

On arriving at Paris—a journey not then accomplished, as now, between the rising and setting of the sun, but a matter of protracted inconvenience—the first care of John Watts was to procure the enlargement of the noble

prisoner of the Rue de Clichy—who had been so disagreeably taught to understand that privilege of peerage, like Burgundy, loses its virtues by crossing the Channel.

The debt for which Lord Hartingham was in *durance*, though large enough to condemn a man to arrest whose credit was so thoroughly exhausted, was happily not of considerable amount; and previous to making himself answerable for those liabilities to which Helen had alluded in her first application to her sister, the prudent lawyer secured the departure of the delinquent from Paris—that he might treat with unencumbered hands with the host of usurers and other miscreants whose names figured in his schedule. The payments were consequently so arranged, as to be made at his own time and convenience.

By the first aspect of Lord Hartingham and his wife, John Watts was greatly shocked. Notwithstanding the penitential tone of Helen's letters, all her former levity seemed to return in a gush, on learning that she had succeeded to her inheritance! Not an inquiry concerning the mode of her father's death! Not a word respecting the affliction of her sisters! Regan was queen!

Indignant at a degree of heartlessness which was only too manifest; John Watts resolved not to spare her the knowledge of the share exercised by the discovery of her folly and its consequences, in producing the death of Sir George—which, had she shown herself commonly humane, he had purposed to pass *sub silentio*. But even *this* failed of effect! Impossible to overcome that stubborn spirit! Impossible for any other writing to become manifest on the wall, than the cyphers of 8,000*l.* a year!

"Any shock, no matter what," she said, "must produce paralytic seizure, where the constitution, pre-disposed to that tendency, was shattered, as Sir George Downham's had been, by the cares brought on by his speculations and reverse of fortune."

"Still," persisted John Watts, "the quiet life which for five years past he had been leading——"

"Probably accelerated the evil!" was Regan's cool reply. "When my father resided at Downham Hall, generous living brought on periodical fits of the gout—to which of late, I fancy, he has been no longer subject. And we all know the baneful effect on the constitution of a latent gout, which it has not strength to throw out."

It was not because he knew himself to be an object of contempt to the lady with patrician blood in her veins; for, but that she was Blanche's sister, he would have repaid her scorn for scorn. It was not because he had been snubbed by her as a gawkey school-boy; or, that even in her distresses, she continued to write of his family, as "those odious Wattses." It was that, amid all her hatefulnesses, she still preserved that family resemblance to her sister which had recommended her to the impassioned eyes of Lord Hartingham, and which was wormwood to the truer lover of Blanche. He could not bear to trace in anything kindred to his Pearl, and bearing the relationship recorded in her face, the bold, worldly daring he detected in Lord Hartingham's wife. He saw in her the accomplished actress; whose impromptus were made at leisure, and whose smart sayings were sharpened on the hone of a stony heart!

From the period of Helen's marriage, they had previously met but once. The Hartinghams had spent a day at Southwold, three years before, on their way to London from a sporting visit at Stokesleigh Manor:—a concession to Blanche, who for years past, had been vainly endeavoring to effect a reconciliation between her sister and father. Unluckily, considering the mutual feeling of the parties, at the moment of their unexpected visit, the Squire and his son happened to be passing the day at the cottage: (one of those rare days of happiness marked with a white pebble,) which enabled the devoted young man to get through the remaining three hundred and sixty-four of professional drudgery. And though the Doesbury visitors hastened to withdraw from a scene of such delicate family interest as the meeting between Lady Hartingham and her ruined father, the quick eye of John Watts had time to note the change which, even then, the glare of fashion had effected in the brilliancy of the Diamond.

He saw too, that to find him there, domesticated with her family, renewed in a moment all her former disgusts: and justly anticipated that, on his departure, Blanche would be exposed to the bitterest raillery for her pertinacious patronage of the Doesbury Boor; and his suit not having at that time reached its present happy climax, he looked forward with fear and trembling to the results of Lady Hartingham's visit and opposition. Even now, he could not altogether divest himself of a dread of her interference, when she should be apprized of the events of the last two years; those years of wilful estrangement on her own part, which kept her still ignorant of her sister's promise to become his wife.

But he was already determined that she should never establish an influence in his house. As farmers dread the lighting of thistledown upon their land, he could not regard as insignificant what was so pregnant with mischief.

When he offered Lady Hartingham his escort back to England, that she might rejoin her family at the moment of her father's funeral, she was scarcely able to conceal her surprise at his considering any such duty incumbent on one who for years past had been so wholly estranged from them. As to his notion that the company of Mr. Watts, the lawyer, could be the smallest advantage to a peeress, "the Right Honorable Lady Hartingham, of Downham Hall," she could scarcely reconcile his shrewdness in business with such total want of tact.

"I shall find Hartingham waiting for me at Dover," said she, carelessly; "and am too much used to travelling to require the smallest assistance;"—the talisman of a purse of gold to defray her journey, having been previously supplied by the man whom she regarded much in the same light as her friend Lord Stokesleigh regarded his groom of the chambers!

Before his departure from Paris, which preceded by a day that of Lady Hartingham, he remembered with surprise that he had not so much as heard mention of the names of two persons with whom he had looked forward with some disgust to being brought into contact, in the arrangement of Helen's affairs:—Lord Stokesleigh and Lady Mary Hartley. But the former, he found, had been passing the Spring in Italy; whereas the Hartleys, after following the usual itinerary of the decayed English in France, were looking forward to a removal to Boulogne, for change of air for a consumptive son.

At Dover, he found—*not* Lord Hartingham, whose impatience to revisit London under his altered circumstances had carried him straight to the Clarendon Hotel,—but a letter from Blanche; apprizing him that Lady Downham, who, as Sir George had died intestate, was to administer to his estate, had caused the funeral to take place at the end of a week, without waiting for the Hartingham's arrival. Evidently in fear of reproaches concerning the opening of the letter, she wished to avoid a family congress at Southwold.

"So much the better!" was his commentary on the intelligence. "Blanche will thus be spared the vexation of knowing how little her sister was disposed to participate in her pious cares."

It was annoying enough to be again forced into contact with people he liked so little as the Hartinghams. But he had to render an account of his disbursements; and on arriving in town, hastened to the Clarendon, for a few explanations concerning certain disputed claims; and to inform his Lordship, that the gross sum he was indebted to his sister-in-law amounted to £2,300.

At Paris, he had been far better pleased with the husband than with the wife. Instead of echoing the sentiment he had often heard uttered by Blanche, that "if married to a man of superior character, Helen would have become the most charming creature in the world," *he* was inclined to think, that had the idle young Lord become the companion of a woman possessing a heart as well as a head, he might have turned out a better member of society.

It is true, the lawyer had seen Lord Hartingham at his best. The joy of finding himself unexpectedly released from durance, which, long impending over him, had brought him for the first time to a sense of his own nothingness, produced an unusual expansion of feeling in his nature; and out of the abundance of his heart, his mouth had spoken. But he was habitually as honest of speech as is compatible with the vocation of a man of the world, who like the clown in the pantomine, is always wanting to make people believe that his empty pockets are overflowing.

But already, during that brief interim of his three days' stay in London, Hartingham had degenerated. A plunge into the atmosphere of fashion had produced the same revivification of his former follies, which certain well-puffed liquids are said to produce on the gilding of old picture-frames. The flies had gathered round the newly-opened honey-pot; and his rooms at the Clarendon were overflowing with *roues*, old and young—his own cotemporaries and his father's. One offered him a share of his moor; another tried to drag him off to Tattersall's to the sale of his horses; a third asked him to a Greenwich dinner; a fourth, (the best dressed man in town, who knew the full value of the compliment!) asked him for the pattern of his waistcoat. Impossible to be more warmly welcomed.

"My dear Hart., you must positively dine with me to-day or to-morrow," said Sir Horace Lumley. "We'll have a talk over old times, and what's better still, over new ones. You'll find London horribly changed, Hart!"

While gazing at the superanhuated dandy, whose once chubby cheeks, grown flaccid, were supported by a starched cravat, and whose slightly silvered hair had been exchanged, during Hartingham's absence, for a spruce brown Brutus, the returned exile trusted that London might be only half as much altered as his quondam friend.

"What are you going to do with yourself, Hart.?" resumed Lumley, little suspecting the nature of the reflections that kept him silent. "I suppose you're only come over for a look at your new property? Like Stokesleigh and the rest of them, you'll never be able to exist without Paris!"

"A bad shy, Lumley! I should have been overjoyed to exist without Paris any time these two years, if Paris would have been confiding enough to do without *me!* I came over the first minute 'twas in my power!"

"But of course you'll not think of settling down in Suffolk?"

"My dear Lum.!—trust me that, after a long tour in the desert, and striking one's tent-poles every morning, a place of one's own in England—no matter the county or the neighborhood—is a mighty pleasant thing! Paris, like a suit of velvet and gold lace, is far less comfortable for daily wear than your plain broadcloth. The thoughts of beef and pudding, my dear sir, revive my nationality; and I have no doubt I shall soon look upon game-preserving, poacher-shooting, and plantation-making, as better fun than loo and lansquenet!"

"Then I suppose Efferville may give up his notion of obtaining a lease of Downham Hall? It seems they've been laying out a mint of money there—counting on Sir George's life as a better one than it proved!"

"I'm sorry Efferville thinks he's made a bad thing of it. He should have insured the old fellow's life: he should have hedged——"

"*Hedged!*" retorted Sir Horace. "The only hedging of which Efferville is cognizant, my dear fellow, is hedging and ditching! As soon as he married the Duke of Warton's daughter, his Grace inoculated—no, *vaccinated*—him, with the agricultural mania, by way of keeping him steady. But, to say the truth, Hart.," resumed Sir Horace, encouraged to familiarity by the pun, (always a leveller of distinctions,) "we were agreeing at White's the night your father-in-law's death was announced in the *Globe*, that, with all your incumbrances to be

paid off, you'd never be able to keep up such a place as Downham."

"Did you? I dare say you know best! but, if you can't keep it up, we must pull it down. At all events, depend upon it, I shan't let it to Efferville—which, tell him, with my best compliments!'

And though both he and Helen had agreed, in the single interview which had taken place between them since their change of prospects, that to reside at Downham under the most favorable circumstances, people must be made of the same stiff clay that composed its soil; and that, degraded as the family had been, in the eyes of the county, and gossipped over by such people as the Pro. Wattses, and other indigenous savages, they would rather live elsewhere in a barn or barrack; no sooner had Lord Hartingham learned that the world considered his fortune inadequate to such a residence, than his obstinacy drew itself up; and he determined that the Effervilles should beat as speedy a retreat from its gates, as he had seen his father and mother compelled to do from Glastonbury Castle.

"Well, I'm glad to find that you'll be so much better off than we fancied!" said Sir Horace, who had been momentarily discomfited by his abruptness. "But, you see, we thought you would do something for your father, (who, I'm afraid, is deucedly *hard up*, eh?) And then, we heard you'd got into Sangster's hands; and the affairs which *he* undertakes to wind up, are usually twisted into a rope, with which a man might as well hang himself at once!"

"Another bad shy, Lum.! It was Sir George Downham who was broken on the wheel in Sangster's hands! Yet even *he*, you see, lived to be nearly sixty!"

"True! I remember now! Railways, canal shares, and Spanish bonds!"

"The person who *is* to settle my affairs, (since they appear to interest you,") resumed Lord Hartingham, with a sarcastic smile, "is that *rara avis*, an *honest* lawyer—a man of the name of Watts."

"Any relation to the member for Farnham?"

"Who is the member for Farnham?"

"Another man of the name of Watts—and a monstrous rising fellow, I can tell you! He made a speech on the criminal code, at the beginning of the session, which almost took the conceit (which is no easy thing) out of Harley; and a reply to Manby, on the sugar question, that flayed him alive."

"Then I take him to be nothing to *my* Watts—who is an active man of business, the son of one of old Downham's country neighbors."

"Oh—aye—an active man of business?" said Sir Horace, collecting his gloves and cane for departure, as steps, approaching the room, announced the coming of other visitors. "The most hateful sort of animal to deal with, on earth!—a man who seems to have been born half-an-hour too late, and hurry-scurries through the world, to recover the lost time!"

At that moment, the tall, handsome person of John Watts appeared in the doorway. And from the manner in which Sir Horace sidled round to make way for him, Lord Hartingham decided at once that it *was* his man of business, and no other, who had almost taken the conceit out of Harley, and the skin off Lord Manby's shoulders!

He received him accordingly, with the deference due to one of whom even Sir Horace Lumley's impudence stood in awe!

CHAPTER XXIV.

Two months afterwards, the Hartinghams paid their first visit to Downham Hall.

On finding it impossible to obtain a lease of the place, Lord Efferville had made overtures to the new proprietors for the purchase of his furniture; and as Lady Hartingham was too proud to signify to the recreant knight whom she had never forgiven, that their nominal income equalled only a third of his own, and their real income a sixth part of it—rendering the splendors supplied to *him* by Sappy Savory ill-fitted for their more modest requirements—it was agreed that the whole should be taken at a valuation, and paid for by instalments.

Lord Hartingham's object in accepting the proposal, was to save himself trouble;—Lady Hartingham's, to escape pleading poverty to people whom she longed to crush into the dust.

The economical projects intimated to John Watts had already evaporated, where good resolutions are so apt to evaporate, in the overheated atmosphere of fashionable life. Aware that of the eight thousand a year they inherited, one thousand was bespoken by Lady Downham's jointure, and half as much more by the interest of the sum to be raised for the fortunes of the younger children, they had in the first instance determined to appropriate two thousand five hundred more to the gradual extinction of their debts—leaving half their income for their enjoyment:—and as Lord Hartingham admitted, four thousand a year for people living as they had lately lived, contained the wealth of Peru!

But all this was conceived, promised, and vowed, in the small breakfast-room, where the newly-arrived couple and the man of business cast up accounts.

Their time was too agreeably taken up in cementing anew those golden bonds of fashionable acquaintanceship, which filled their visiting list with a host of names, and their rooms with bevies of smiling faces, to remember any thing half so rational as their good resolutions thus formed.

As usual on such occasions, rumor had quadrupled the amount of their inheritance. Sir Horace, the great gnat whose buzzing in the sunshine had foreshown so many premature summers, went about announcing, "from the best authority," that "Hart. had come into a clear twenty thousand a year, besides that place in Suffolk which Efferville had half ruined himself by furnishing." And they were con-

sequently received with open arms into those brilliant coteries, which find it easier to swallow their friends, like their pills, when gilded.

Aware that her now flying colors had been recently trailed in the mire, Lady Hartingham thought it necessary to re-establish herself by taking pains to please; and when Helen *did* make the attempt, she was irresistible.

Nor was Hartingham far behind his wife in winning golden opinions. To have just succeeded to a fortune of twenty thousand a-year and possess a beautiful and talented wife, might have made even a Ralph Holcombe acceptable. But the superadded advantages of being, as Sir Horace Lumley said, "such a deuced good-looking fellow, and a fellow with whom one might spend ten days in quarantine without feeling bored," he had a right to be, as he was, the *fleur des pois* of the last quarter of the London season.

Before August carried the Hartinghams into Suffolk to take possession of Downham, they had given and accepted half a hundred invitations to all that was gay and brilliant of the exclusive world.

"As soon as your yacht is laid up," said Hartingham to the young Marquis of Winchmore, "you must come to us in Suffolk; and help us to exorcise the demons of dulness which the Effervilles have doubtless entailed upon us with the rest of their lumber. Stokesleigh, Lumley, and a host of pleasant fellows, have promised to be with us for pheasant-shooting."

Such promises, and a dozen more of which her husband knew nothing, might well account for the triumphant air with which Tullia prepared to take possession of the throne of the Tarquins. "The Wartons should see in how different a manner from the hum-drum style of the Effervilles, things would *now* be done at Downham Hall!"

There was but one drawback on her joy. She had been duly apprized by Blanche, that, at the end of her mourning, she was to become John Watts' wife!—Yes! *her* sister—the sister of the fashionable Lady Hartingham—was content to live and die as Mrs. Watts of Doesbury Lodge!

"There really seems to be some natural perversity in Blanche," she exclaimed, when talking over the affair wiht her husband. "It amounts to depravity of taste!—Don't laugh!—You cannot half appreciate the evil.—You have not seen, as I have, my father (who was certainly not remarkable for excess of refinement,) so disgusted by the intrusive vulgarity of the Doesbury Lodge people, *pere et mere*, that, if it had not been for Lady Downham's sense of decorum, he would have left off going to church, altogether, from dread of the nuisance of their weekly greetings at the church-porch! My father absolutely loathed them!"

"So he did *me*. But I never loved myself the less for *that!*"

"You had provoked him, Hart. Whereas Pro. Watts and his wife were always his most obedient, humble servants. Mrs. Pro., (a *Macedoine* of Mrs. Glass, Mrs. Chapone, and Buchan's Domestic Medicine,) used to be perpetually pony-chaised over to the Hall; to edify our worthy governess, Mrs. Temple, with hints upon the formation of the juvenile mind, and the physicking of the juvenile body. Such a woman! a Tambour-Major, capable of reducing a whole brigade of Spahis to subordination!"

"Her son, at least, is a credit to her discipline!" observed Hartingham, between the puffs of his cigar.

"A credit to *her*, granted! But that is no reason why he should become a *discredit* to *us!* Think of the Delavals and De Hautefords meeting the Wattses at our house! For *my* part, I shall cut matters short with Doesbury Lodge, from the very first. My long absence from Suffolk enables me to take up a new standing in the county."

"And do you mean also to exclude your sister?" demanded Lord Hartingham, sarcastically; for though far from enamoured of the Watts connection, he was not insensible to the obligations owing to the family.

"No! but I hope to prevent the match altogether, by bringing Blanche to a more becoming sense of what is due to herself and us. I mean to put the question before her in the strongest light. I mean to ask her whether she imagines that a Mrs. Watts will ever be received in decent society; and whether her cousins in St. James's Square are not *far* happier and *far* more respectable in their single blessedness, than if they had disgraced themselves by a *mesalliance* such as she meditates? Depend upon it, she cannot hold out against such arguments as those!"

A reiteration of the word "arguments" was faintly muttered by her husband. But he did not attempt to defend a lost cause.

"The fact is," resumed Helen, warming to her subject, "that Blanche, with her beauty, her fortune, and her prospect, might marry anybody! If we have no children, a son of hers would inherit the Barony of Hartingham! And just conceive a John Watts having a son in the House of Lords!"

"Why not?" cried Lord Hartingham, laughing with all his might at her air of horror.—"Why not, as well as a Pratt or a Smith?—Such *very* funny people have been ennobled of late years!"

"I do believe you take delight in mortifying me!" rejoined his wife. However, it *shan't* be, I am determined! Blanche will meet a class of persons at *our* house, such as she has never seen before. And remember, how Lord Stokesleigh was struck with her in Eaton Place! For months afterwards, he was always talking to me about the *bellissima Bianca*."

"Ay, and as usual with Stokesleigh's passions, all ended in talk" replied Hartingham, flinging away the remainder of his cigar.—"However, place your Pearl in a rich setting, if you can."

The first step made by Lady Hartingham towards the accomplishment of her plans, was by an invitation to Blanche to take up her residence with them at the Hall. But she little understood her sister. So far from consenting to quit her quiet roof so soon after the death of the only parent she had ever known, she

first wits and leading conversation-men of the day; and the result was, that, as in a theatre which has no specific line but where all sorts of performances were attempted, not a single company was complete.

In spite, therefore, of the marble oyster-room, and smoking divan, and baths of every degree of caloric, which the Hartinghams had added to the pre-existing comforts of the house, it was scarcely so popular as in the hum-drum days of the Effervilles. The servants jostled each other,—the guests jarred.—Lord Stokesleigh, to take whose ultra-refined refinements by surprise, was the grand ambition of Lady Hartingham, was overheard to whisper to his cousin, the spiteful Lady Wolverton, that Downham Hall reminded him of Burlington Arcade with the *Jardin d'hiver* tacked to its gas-lit stalls.

This was of course reported, by way of pleasantry, to Lady Hartingham, by some of her good-natured friends; and the consequence was, that she followed the traitor like his shadow, about the drawing-room, the following evening, hoping to overhear some whispered detraction. By the manner in which he gave his attention to her friend Lady Theodora, beside whom lounged also Mawman and Sir Horace Lumley, all three glancing towards her, every now and then, with twinkling eyes, she suspected they were discussing subjects, in which the part of the drama assigned to herself, was far from flattering.

Having placed herself on an adjacent sofa, ostensibly in conversation with Sir Grimwood, she contrived to catch nearly every syllable of their discourse.

"And prettier, you think, than even Lady Hartingham?"—was Lady Theodora's inquiry of Mawman.

"Prettier is not the word. The other sister is not pretty. She is beautiful! Beautiful in soul and body."

"I remember seeing her some years ago, when on a visit to the Hartinghams in Eaton Place," added Stokesleigh: "and certainly never beheld a creature more thoroughly lovely!"

"When they were girls," interposed Sir Horace, "I am told they used to be called the Diamond and the Pearl of Downham Hall. Now, diamonds are flashy things; but for daily wear, give me the Pearl!"

"Did you make out," inquired Lady Theodora, with growing curiosity, "what originated the coolness between them? Sisters, to become strangers to each other, must at one time or another, have been rivals?"

"And so I fancy they were! But all that's been long past and forgotten," replied Sir Lumley, playing with the tassel of the Chinese screen he had taken from the hand of Lady Theodora.

"Still, it is so *very* odd," persisted her ladyship, with a very *rinforzato* accent, "that this Mrs. Watts should not be of our party."

"It would strike me as still odder, if she were!" rejoined Mawman. "Even in these blushless days, a lady might feel embarrassed in a party of five-and-twenty strangers, ten days after her marriage!"

"But surely you said there were other people, besides the bride and bridegroom, staying at Doesbury Lodge?"

"Only *two*,—near relations of the family: or rather there was *a* person,—for Holcombe and Lady Marian positively form but *one!*"

"But you have not explained what took you to the house, at all?" inquired Lord Stokesleigh of Mawman and Sir Horace.

"Simply what would have taken any man, who knows how to appreciate the best grouse-soup in London," replied the former; "a commission of the Duchess of Dumfries. When I left Dumfries Palace, on my road into Suffolk, her Grace intrusted me with a packet of tracts, or Shetland stockings, or lace pocket-handkerchiefs, or no matter what, to convey to her daughter; who, she informed me, was to spend the Christmas holidays at Doesbury Lodge."

"And so, to the great economy of her Grace's postage-stamps, to Doesbury Lodge you went!"

"To Doesbury Lodge I went; and was amply rewarded far my pains, by the pleasure of seeing one of the sweetest women on earth; and the agreeable surprise of finding her the newly-made wife of my honorable friend the member for Farnham."

"But how came Lum. to be your Sidrophel?" still persisted the inquisitive Stokesleigh.

"Who would ever have suspected Sir Horace," added Lady Theodora, "of volunteering a visit to the stye of a Suffolk Squire."

"His sins be upon my head!" rejoined Mawman. "When I found just as I was about to start, that Hartingham was looking for him, far and near, to make up his rubber, I beguiled poor Lum. into driving me over in his phaeton."

"For which, I have immensely to thank you!" replied Sir Horace, languidly. "But for *you*, I might never have known that our fair hostess possesses a sister ten times fairer than herself; or that Watts is in fact one of the landed gentry. His grandmother, Ralph Holcombe tells me, was the representative of the extinct peerage of Lord Probyn of Yatford."

"One never suspects a genius like Watts of having grandfathers or grandmothers," retorted Lord Stokesleigh. "And I must say, I'm sorry to find him a gentleman born. Not half so likely to exert his great abilities, as if he had been found, like Sir Thomas Gresham, under a hedge, after the decampment of some gypsy gang."

"A gentleman born?—His father's place at Doesbury, I can tell you, is one of the prettiest things I have seen for an age," said Mawman, who felt a little uneasy at allusions to political adventurers. "Though not a fourth part the size of Downham, it is ten times as attractive."

"In short, my dear Mawman," said Lord Stokesleigh, "Mrs. Watts's beautiful face caused the scales to fall from your eyes, and you returned to Downham to find everything mere-

tricious and profane, after your adieu to Una and her lions!"

"I'm sure I wish he had brought them back with him," cried Lady Theodora, peevishly. "One sadly feels the want of a few new faces and new ideas! I wonder whether Lady Hartingham could contrive to get these Wattses over to Downham—if only to dinner?"

"They would not come if she did call for them!" said Mawman with a significant nod. "If I know anything of John Watts, he would as soon risk his wife in a cholera hospital, as in a house frequented by my friends Stokesleigh and Lum."

"Quite right!" was his Lordship's rejoinder. "The wings of geese and angels should ever be white as the driven snow. His beauteous bride is much better at home."

Such was Lady Hartingham's repayment for all the trouble she had given herself to collect around her those whom she had hitherto counted upon as allies!

But her annoyances were far from at an end. In the course of the morrow, Lady Theodora contrived to inquire of every other lady in the house, whether they knew that "Lady Hartingham had a married sister, a most charming woman, living within a mile of her park lodge, who did not visit her; but with whom the Delavals and a very pleasant party were spending the Holidays?"

Then came the generous rejoinders of the Mrs. Candours and Sir Benjamin Blackbites: that "so unnatural an estrangement was greatly to be lamented! But that, considering how far poor dear Lady Hartingham had gone with Lord Stokesleigh, no one could be surprised! Not that *they* had ever believed there was anything beyond friendly intimacy between them. Lord Stokesleigh had certainly been a great friend, perhaps a very *convenient* friend to Lord Hartingham. But it was scandalous to suppose that such friendships entailed an immoral consideration. Still, people would talk:—and, in fact, considering all things, it was scarcely to be wondered at, that poor dear Lady Hartingham's country neighbors should have taken the alarm: how much more, those connected with her by ties of consanguinity."

"I declare," cried Lady Theodora, at the close of a third day, terrified like a boor who has raised the devil, by a mischief of her own creation,—"had I known all this, I would not have come here for worlds!—It was very unkind of people not to forewarn me; for if Lady Hartingham's own family will not visit her, her case must be nearly desperate!"—

One by one, the female portion of the guests slunk away,—most of them curtailing their promised visit.—After they were gone, though the loungers in the house stuck fast by the new *chef* and first rate billiard-table, pretending to hail with delight the departure of those "confounded women who, whether they sung out of tune or talked out of reason, chose to be listened to,"—the gaiety of the house relaxed. More claret was drunk,—more cigars were smoked,—more billiards played. But the thing went slower and slower; till Hartingham, who had tact enough to perceive that the party was a failure, led the way in sudden excesses of wine and play, which Helen, dispirited and ashamed, wanted self possession to interdict.

The dissolute desperation of the Hall got wind,—was talked of at Doesbury,—at Southwold.—

"I told you so!—I foresaw all this!"—was Lady Downham's remark to poor Louisa, after Dr. Maidstone had one day presumed to relate an anecdote of the guests at the Hall sallying forth one morning at daybreak, in full dress, after a drinking bout, to skate on the lake;—when, the ice having broken under Sir Horace Lumley, Dr. Maidstone's colleague, Barker of Doesbury, had been called in to assist in his revival, after immersion in the frozen water.—

"I told you so, child!—Lady Hartingham's profligate folly will end in bringing disgrace upon us all!"

At Doesbury Lodge, from whence Blanche and her husband, as well as the Holcombes, had already taken their departure, the affair was still more severely canvassed. Even putting out of the question the pecuniary obligations of the Hartinghams toward his son, old Pro. could not forgive the narrow-minded, cold-blooded opposition of Helen to her sister's marriage.

"After showing such absolute indifference to Blanche's happiness," said the old squire to his spouse, "'tisnt to be wondered at, my dear, that she should turn her back on a brace of old quizzes of country neighbors like you and me; But there's no occasion because she's sent us to Coventry, that she should indulge in vagaries which will, may be, send her to Coventry herself."

Could Helen have surmised what was passing in the mind of her husband, her compunctious visitings would have been of a far more poignant nature. Never, from the moment of their marriage, had his feelings been more embittered against her. Her accession of fortune had so singularly developed the peremptory nature of her disposition, that, though the superiority she assumed over him was in some measure the result of seniority of age, he was justified in attributing it solely to her scorn of his destitution, and the degraded position of his family. That he hated her for it, need not be doubted. That he hated her still more on seeing her so harsh towards the friends of their adversity, is equally certain. But when to his anger against his wife was added his perception of the superiority of the Blanche he had madly thrown over for her sake,—the lovely, gentle, unassuming Blanche,—the Pearl, whom every one loved, and every one honored,—it was a rash thing of his wife to try him with daily taunts, and goad him with hourly reproaches.

By Lumley, Stokesleigh, and others of his guests, he was beset with questions about his fair sister-in-law. Lord Stokesleigh and one or two other loungers had more than once encountered her, renewing her acquaintance with the environs, leaning on her husband's arm; her face beaming with health and happiness, and her step elastic and joyous.—

"A good-looking fellow enough!" was Stokesleigh's observation,—after following the

example of those of the party who happened to be known to John Watts, by touching his hat:—"But by Jove! such a wife as *that* is too great a stroke of luck for any mortal breathing!—Modesty, beauty, tenderness, intelligence!—Even *I* should not scruple to marry, if there were *two* such prizes in the wheel!"

On which, Hartingham, who had not yet outgrown the weakness of copying the cut of his loves and likings, as well as of his coats and carriages, from those of whatever man was held to be the reigning king of fashion, was forced to admit that his cousin Blanche did indeed merit her long-established name of "The Pearl."—

Such encomiums did not tend to lessen his perception of the haughty temper of his wife; and when the last travelling-carriage which aided to disperse the party at Downham Hall had driven from the gates, he discovered by sudden enlightenment that the house was a dull house,—the park a mediocre park,—and the neighborhood "the most confoundedly bad of any in England."—At that moment, even without having calculated that fifty servants had sat down daily to dinner under his roof during the holidays, and that the weekly cost of his household amounted to nearly a thousand pounds, he most sincerely repented that Helen had not accepted the overtures of Lord Efferville for a lease of the Hall.

Still, Hartingham was desirous to put a plausible face upon the matter.—

"After living abroad so long," said he, "I feel it incumbent on me not to absent myself entirely from my duties in parliament. My face must not be *quite* strange in the House of Lords; and as the West Indian question, and several others of moment, will come on early in the session, I shall certainly run up to the Clarendon for a day or two, whenever I find that I am wanted."—

A pretty clear hint to Helen that *she* was not wanted at the Clarendon. But she was too conscious of her advantages to have a line of conduct suggested to her.

"You are quite right," said she. "A man in your position owes it to himself, his family, and his country, to exercise all the functions attached to his station. Nothing will be easier for us than to run up to town when any business of moment is going on. But hotels are as costly as they are comfortless. Far better engage a small house for the season, where we may establish ourselves when occasion needs."

"Far better," meant, (and Lord Hartingham perfectly understood it to mean,) "I have made up my mind to go to London for the season; and shall write to the house-agent by this very post."

Aware that the authority of his heiress-wife was not to be gainsayed, he ventured no opposition. The letter was written and despatched. But so long a list of "houses to be let furnished" was forwarded in return, that Lady Hartingham determined to hasten up to London and judge for herself.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The young couple from Doesbury Lodge, meanwhile, had preceded them in their settlement in town. The home which old Pro. and his wife had been at the pains of a journey to London to prepare for the bride of their only son, was a small old-fashioned mansion in one of those mean narrow streets in Westminster, which redeem their sins of construction by commanding a view of Birdcage Walk.

Adjoining both Westminster Hall and the House of Commons, the house was unimpeachable; though old Pro., who was so thoroughly pleased with it, when complete, as to vindicate his dignity by fishing out a fault, remarked, that "it was a thousand pities it had not been in May Fair. That home-ridden son of his would never stir a step, except the few hundred yards between his own house and the Commons, and die of plethora before the year was out!"

And sooth to say, when John came in person to inspect the scene of his future happiness, and found his books removed from his bachelor chambers carefully arranged in his new study, and a charming breakfast-room overlooking the park, adorned with a series of exquisite water-color drawings in the style of Cattermole, by Blanche and Louisa, and the work-table and favorite piano of his wife,—he *did* throw out a hint that he would not purchase by a pinch of snuff, the privilege of ever again recrossing the threshold.

Nor was this feeling likely to diminish, when his Eden came to be shared by his chosen Eve. Luckily, Blanche had lived so little in London, as to experience real interest and pleasure in visiting, with her husband, a number of historical sites and remarkable monuments, as unknown to those whose notions of London promenades are comprised in the Parks and Kensington Gardens, as if they existed at Memphis. And as one of the well-selected wedding presents of old Pro. was a neat barouche with a pair of bays of his own breeding and breaking, the three non-parliamentary days of the week enabled Glorious John to discredit his own assertion, that, with such a home, he cared not ever to set foot elsewhere.

Another vow of John Watts's bachelorhood was soon equally infringed. He had promised Blanche, and his own jealous avidity of her company had led him to desire, that they should live wholly apart from what is called the world. But when this resolution came to be tested, there were half-a-dozen magnats of his party, against whom it was impossible to close his doors; who, after making the acquaintance of a wife so worthy of him, left him no peace till she had been introduced within their own. Then there was his patron, Lord Carlingford, at the head of one of the most agreeable and princely houses in London, whose overtures it would have been madness to reject. Next, came the claims of his cousin, Ralph Holcombe,—whose wife, Lady Mary Delaval, exhibited more sense than could have been expected from her, by persuading him to accept John Watts for fugleman, in the outset of his

political life; so that, in rejecting *their* friendship, a recruit would have been lost to the party. And Lady Marian brought the Duchess of Dumfries,—and the Duchess of Dumfries brought the Effervilles,—who had learned, during their residence in Suffolk, to appreciate to the utmost the virtues of the Pearl of Downham Hall.

Not one of these people would be denied. The rising reputation of John Watts bespoke their reverence, as much as the graceful gentleness of his wife attracted their admiration. And at dinner parties at their respective houses, other acquaintanceships were forced upon the popular young couple, which loaded their hall-table with visiting cards, and their memorandum-book with engagements. The busy member soon began to look upon the work days when he hurried through an early dinner with his wife, as more his own, and far more enjoyable, than his holidays beset with inevitable Members' feasts.

But the lava of enthusiasm boiling in the veins of the happy husband, was as yet unslaked with the snow-water of experience; and he had not courage to forego the delight of seeing his Blanche appreciated as she deserved. It was a triumph to him, (for even the strongest mind has its weak corner,) to see that, however contumelious the behavior of her nearest of kin,—Mrs. John Watts, yes—Mrs. John Watts—was courted by those whom the Hartinghams were not so much as admitted to court in their turn!

Nor is it to be denied that Blanche found considerable satisfaction in the social brilliancies so new to her. The conversation of agreeable women and able men was a pleasure hitherto untasted. Never before had she seen her dear John to such advantage. With her, he had been simply an adoring lover; and in talking down to the level of his family circle and her own, though he had charmed her by displaying a mild humanity more endearing than the highest flights of human intelligence, it raised him immeasurably in the estimation of his wife to hear him vanquish the best talkers of the day, not only by the play of his wit, but the closeness of his reasoning.

It happened, therefore, that on Helen's arrival in town, one of the first inquiries with which she was beset by her fashionable friends, regarded Mr. and Mrs. Watts. Lady Sophia Dufresne, who had dined with them some days before, at Delaval House, instead of talking about the forthcoming season, the new modes in vogue, or the splendid furniture sent down to Lady Hartingham by Sappy Savory, accosted her with, "Do tell me, my dear, whether this beautiful Mrs. Watts, about whom all the world is raving, is *really* a sister of yours?—Dufresne wanted the other night, to bet a hundred guineas to the contrary,—as we never happened in the course of our acquaintance with you, to hear you mention having a sister. But as the man who offered to bet was one likely to know your family secrets far better than ourselves, Dufresne was prudent enough to let it be taken up by one of those foolish boys of Lord de Hauteford's, who would bet that black was blue, for the pleasure of recording it at Whites!"

"And who is the fortunate winner? for my sister she *is!*" coolly replied Lady Hartingham.

"Oh! Stokesleigh, of course! Did I not say it was some one acquainted *par excellence* with your family affairs?"

By others, she was attacked with entreaties for an introduction to "the Wattses."

"Cannot you contrive to get me your beautiful sister for my ball? I hold so much to having everything that is fairest and most fashionable!"—or—"Pray, dear Lady Hartingham, contrive to introduce me to your sister, before my Saturdays commence. She is just now, you know, the craze of the season!"

But it was not alone in the gatherings together of fashionable fools, that the fair face of the Pearl was regarded as an indispensable ornament. The Wattses were heard of breakfasting with Rogers and Monckton Milnes; or as the chief objects of a dinner at Holland House. And Helen, who, from the moment of landing in England as proprietress of Downham Hall, had been bent on making a sensation in the *beau monde*, with the full conviction that such an achievement was her due, was amazed to find that, unless her quiet, modest, unpretending sister were pleased to stand out of her light, she was very likely to pass unnoticed.

"You were overhasty, Helen, in declaring war to the knife against the family at Doesbury!" said even her husband, after spending an evening or two at his club, and "looking in" for half an hour at the House of Lords. "I hear of nothing but John Watts! And it is provoking to hear oneself so nearly related to *the* man of the day, and not dare to own the connection, lest people should ask why we are at variance."

"Turn my prejudice into what ridicule you please, Hart.," she replied, fractiously; "you were as much shocked as myself at the idea of Blanche throwing herself away upon a vulgar obscure lawyer!"

"But since he proves to be neither vulgar nor obscure"—

"How could we tell? Unless people have a lawsuit going on, what do they know about the rising bar? All I said was in the hope of dissuading Blanche. But now that what is done cannot be *un*done, the best thing we could all do, would be to forgive and forget."

"Ay—but I'm afraid John Watts conceives the honors of clemency to rest on his side. It is he and his family who have been insulted, and have a right to be resentful. However, as far as I am concerned, I have done nothing to widen the breach. Whenever Watts is mentioned before *me*, I say candidly that he is my brother-in-law."

"A prodigious concession, when the Baronetage tells as much in print!"

"But it does not tell what I am proud to add, that he is a capital fellow; and that when I was in difficulties, he and his *fiancee* helped the lame dog over the stile!"

This was said chiefly to annoy his wife, as

it was precisely a question in which, not being a financial one, he had a right to have an opinion of his own.

Lady Hartingham, however, was less intent just then upon decrying the Wattses, than upon eclipsing them. From the moment she learned that they were established in a charming house of their own, it became impossible to content herself in an hotel. As she had anticipated, the newspapers took care that Blanche should not be slow in hearing that "Lord and Lady Hartingham were arrived in town for the season, and had engaged the noble mansion on the Terrace, Piccadilly, belonging to the Dowager Marchioness of Bodmin:"—intelligence which sincerely grieved her;—not because it was a house six times finer than her own, but because it was six times beyond the means of the Hartinghams.

Other deterioratives, alas! came in time; when she had occasion to hear, amid the flow of tittle-tattle babbling around her in the so ciety into which she was forced, that, not content with the gorgeous drawing-rooms of Lady Bodmin, Lady Hartingham was beginning to indulge in the profligate prodigality sure to infect all triflers whose restless leisure finds occupation in shopping.

One evening at Lady Marian Holcombe's, the Duchess of Dumfries and a party of what are called, "right-thinking people," were discussing a set of *Marqueterie jardinieres* which had just been exhibited by Sappy Savory, under the taking name of "Hartinghams."

"And if we have Pembroke-tables, ham-Sandwiches, Standish inkstands, and Kelmersdale-chairs, why not Hartinghams?" cried Mawman, laughing at the burst of indignation with which the announcement was received.

"Because they imply such a wanton waste of money and art!" replied Lady Augusta Delaval, who, having been apprized in a family-coach-lecture by the Duchess, that Mr. Mawman was a man of unexceptionable character, (and ten thousand a year), was endeavoring to prose herself into his notice. "*Marqueterie*," continued her ladyship sententiously, "being susceptible of injury from the slightest moisture, is peculiarly inapplicable to the construction of a flower-stand; and a less casual substance, that is, a more durable material, would be highly preferable for the purpose."

"But it is the casual nature of the thing that peculiarly constitutes its merit!" cried Mawman. "In Lady Hartingham's boudoir, the rarest vases of old Sevres, Chelsea, and Nankin, are filled weekly with exotics by a booby gardener, at the risk of occasional smashes which a hundred guineas would not repay! But *this* constitutes the Cleopatra-ism of the nineteenth century! *This* is the pearl dissolved in vinegar of Belgravian ostentation!"

"If half we hear of the *marqueterie* flower-stands and Chelsea vases be true," sighed the Duchess of Dumfries, who had just nodded to her son-in-law to ring for her carriage, "I do not give Lord and Lady Hartingham five years to run through their fortune!"

"*Five?*" reiterated Mawman, following her to the door, as she was quitting the room upon the arm of Ralph Holcombe. "Your Grace assigns ample measure! Do you remember the retort of the envoy to whom some petty German sovereign allowed four and twenty hours to quit his dominions—'*Sire, une seule me suffit!*' The Hartinghams are capable of swallowing up a mortgage on the full extent of their property, in a single year's income!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

The engagement which prevented Blanche and her husband from joining the prosification at Lady Marian Holcombe's, was to a dinner party at Hauteford House;—a mansion renowned in the chronicles of fashion for pomps, vanities, and pretensions. Lady de Hauteford was a woman who affected queenly hauteur—or rather, the hauteur which queens *might* exhibit, if not sufficiently well-bred to be aware that the greatness of their rank needs no further assumption; and who, possessed of excellent abilities and a commanding position in society, was as unpopular as a giver of splendid fetes can possibly be among people whose paradise consists in a suite of brilliantly lighted rooms.

It was a great thing to be invited to Lord and Lady De Hauteford's dinners. The *spectacle* they afforded was worth seeing. The plate was gorgeous,—the attendance regal.—But the dulness induced by all this state was so overpowering, and the spasmodic temper of the hostess the origin of such general dread, that timid people longed to be chloroformed before they undertook the operation.

Such was not the feeling of Blanche. To her, the scene was new; and its spendours, as a pictorial show, gratified her eye as much as some showy tableau of Belshazzar's Feast, or the Treasures of King Hezekiah. Though little aware how much her own serene composure, her lily-like fairness, and unassuming white costume, gained by a contrast with the gorgeousness around, she entertained no apprehension of becoming one of the many victims to the volcanic humor of her hostess. Satisfied that she and her husband were as much objects of consideration to the De Hautefords, from the influential position held by John Watts in Lord De Hauteford's party, as any of the Dukes and Duchesses they were invited to meet, Blanche felt that Lady De Hauteford was serving her own purpose by her attentions to them; as much as her Ladyship's brother, Lord Carlingford, by introducing a man of genius, like John Watts, into parliamentary life. If the only commoners present, they were there by right of an ennoblement of Nature's conferring.

But all this did not prevent the banquet from being a heavy affair. Conversation proceeded as laggingly as must always be the case when people are paired according to parity of rank, instead of parity of taste. Several sat together, whose mutual aversion was notorious; the party being as ill-assorted as was always the case at Hauteford House, where the enjoy-

ment of the invited was the last thing contemplated by the hosts.

John Watts was seated between Lady Carlingford, the wife of his patron, a woman who, from the spareness of her form, and density of her intellect, had obtained in Dublin, (that factory of apposite nicknames!) the sobriquet of Lady Thick and Thin; and a dowager of the dryest self-sufficiency, whose words fell from her lips as coldly and deliberately as water from a filter. How was he to find topics of conversation for such women? How was he to avoid glancing every now and then towards the lovely face of his wife; to satisfy himself whether she had the advantage of him in point of neighborhood.

She had been taken down to dinner by Lord Carlingford; a man so saturated with politics, or rather so absorbed in party interests, that the Venus de Medicis might have eaten her tongue and chicken by his side, without his discovering whether she were black, brown, or fair;—and, well aware how little he was in the habit of making himself agreeable, his *protege* felt sorry that poor Blanche should be so unlucky in her second supporter:—a silent, saturnine man, whose sallow face was new to him, and who did little more, while eating a sparing dinner, than bow assentingly—perhaps ironically,—to the law which Lady de Hauteford was laying down at their end of the table;—giving to every sentence, the tone of "La Reine le Veut!" Neither to the vapid Lady Octavia something or other at his right hand, nor to Blanche on his left, was he at the trouble of opening his lips.

Already, Watts was resolving within himself that he would accept no more such dinners. Though, as a bachelor, it behoved him as part and parcel of his political duties, to mark his gratitude towards Lord Carlingford, by cementing something as nearly approaching to friendship with the De Hautefords as her ladyship's variable temperament would allow, there was no occasion to expose poor Blanche to the formalities of the Hauteford hetacombs.

Suddenly, however, just as Lady Carlingford, after a deliberate pause, was replying to his inquiry of whether she had visited the Colosseum, he was startled by hearing the Marquis of Dorchester, a pompous old gentleman of the blue and buff school, or as Mawman called him, "one of the Ancient Masters," exclaim in a sonorous voice, to mark his adherence to obsolete customs,—"Stokesleigh!—a glass of Hock with me?" And very provoking was it to John Watts, to whom the person of this arch-enemy of the Hartingham race was unknown, that the ever-in-the-way profusion of *pieces montees* on table, prevented his ascertaining which of the party bowed acceptance to the proposal. By vocation no haunter of ball-rooms, and the political houses he frequented being precisely those to which Lord Stokesleigh's tenets and habits were odious, they had never before met.

To all present, however, most of whom were well known to him, he could assign a name, except the sallow supercilious gentleman beside his wife! Surprising as it was, that ill-looking man must be the Lauzun,—the Rochester,—the Buckingham, of whose attractions such wonders were related.

From that moment the dinner appeared twice as slow and dreary as before. He was so afraid the Boa might wake from its torpor and spring! So anxious, lest the charm of Blanche's beauty might overcome the prejudices with which Helen had doubtless inspired him against "those Wattses," and tempt the magician to unlock the casket whose exterior was so little prepossessing. The charm of Lord Stokesleigh's conversation, when he *did* converse, was universally said to be irresistible. All John Watts prayed for, therefore, was that he might hold his peace.

At length, the dinner was drowsed through. The procession of ladies stalked off;—and as it was opera night, even the Garters and Baths, the wigs and baldheads, made a pretext of the early announcement of their carriages, to elude the dull debate which was to perfect the tediousness of the entertainment. And no sooner were the Wattses seated side by side in their chariot, than the long repressed impatience of "Glorious John" effervesced.

"*What* people!" cried he. "What an exhausted, effete, inane, inanimate race! With all its wealth and resources, what a colorless order of society! What narrowness of thought,—what narrowness of feeling!—what conventional bondage,—what abject subservience! Not a generous impulse, not a grain of moral courage throughout the tribe;—all shadows of a shade,—all copyists of a copy,—all shrinking terrified from the vulgar innovator who dares to tie his cravat or shape an opinion, in his own way!"

A little surprised at this outbreak, Blanche concluded that Lord De Hauteford's claret must be a little stronger than other people's. But, as she said nothing, her husband proceeded.

"I sometimes reproach myself, darling," said he, "with having been the means of inaugurating you into this frivolous caste: and if I thought its influence would leave so much as a streak or dent upon your pure and gentle nature, Blanche, I should never, *never* forgive myself."

"Not quite so impetuous!" said his wife, laying a restraining hand upon his arm.—"There is no sort of danger! People who so little interest my feelings could never obtain an ascendency over me."

"Such a nature as yours would shake off contamination, 'like dewdrops from a lion's mane,'" said her husband. "Still as a noxious atmosphere undermines the finest constitution, it would have been wiser and better, Blanche, considering the shortness of one's span on earth, if I had thrown over my profession at once; sent politics to the deuce, and settled with you quietly in the country, where competence, at least, awaits us."

"In order," interrupted Blanche, "that you might dwindle into a being as selfish and material as the worst of those you have been decrying; and creep down into an obscure grave, a traitor to your country, by diverting from its service the talents which, properly employed, might have tended to the melioration of man-

kind? No, no! In my opinion, a man makes himself responsible, not only for all the evil he has committed, but for all the good his indolence has left undone!"

John Watts made no reply. He probably had not listened. He was, perhaps, still wondering whether he might not have been a happier man, maundering over green crops and tile drainage at Doesbury Lodge, where fine ladies and coarse lords were unknown; instead of mixing in a world of fops and fools. The mere trifle of seeing his wife's coffee-cup taken from her hand, with a familiar smile, by Lord Stokesleigh, had sufficed to metamorphose, in his eyes, the whole party assembled at Hauteford House as completely as if they had been transformed by Circe's wand. In lieu of Marquises and Knights of the Garter, his mind's eye saw nothing, when he made his parting bow, but *animali parlanti* and grovelling beasts!

"I fancied, at first, Blanche," said he, abruptly, as if replying to his own train of thought, "that you did not recognize that fellow, Stokesleigh? At dinner, you scarcely spoke to him."

"That is, he scarcely spoke to *me!* I should not, however, have recognized him, had he not been named to me by Lady De Hauteford. At the time of our only interview, six years ago, in Eaton Place, he was a remarkably good-looking man."

"Of which no one can accuse him, now!"

"No,—he has lost much in person. But he has more than regained it in address."

"*I* see nothing particularly highbred or fascinating about him!" cried Watts, jerking up the carriage window.

"The absence of all pretension, in such a position as his, is not without its charm," replied Blanche, undreaming of giving offence. "But when I saw him before, his manners were insupportable; so that the change is striking enough."

"I take Lord Stokesleigh to be the sort of man who puts on his manners with his coat," said Watts, sternly. "I don't believe there is anything genuine about him!"

"Then I hope that, whenever we meet, he will wear the same coat and manners as to-day," retorted Blanche; "for I assure you, he was genuinely amusing!"

"Amusing? Why, by Jove! during the whole time I watched you at dinner, you did not exchange ten syllables!"

"He does not say much; but every word *tells.* The coolness of his irony would be unbearable, unless sparingly bestowed. Vitriolic acid becomes poison, I fancy, if administered in more than drops."

The carriage window was now suddenly jerked down again.—The atmosphere was apparently as changeable as Lady De Hauteford's temper!—

"You should have heard him draw out that stupid Lady Octavia!" resumed Blanche, as her husband made no rejoinder. "With apparent naivete he turned to me to quote her observation, that the season was very backward in Wales, which she had just quitted.—'I think your Ladyship informed me,' said he, without moving a muscle, 'that the weather had been so very unfavorable, that there *was nothing green about you?*'—which, with great energy, she confirmed."

"I detest the system of drawing people out to render them ridiculous!" cried John, with honest indignation.—"The meanest order of wit is that which requires a butt!"

"I should be certainly sorry to become either the butt or the marksman," replied Blanche. "But the standers-by cannot help being amused."

"Against their sense of right,—against their principles!"—thought her husband. But he said nothing, lest he should say too much.—He was afraid he already espied a first dent,—a first defeature,—in his Pearl.

"It struck me as peculiarly good taste on the part of Lord Stokesleigh," added Blanche, who was in a highly laudatory mood, "that, situated as we are, he made no allusions to our former meeting, or to the Hartinghams.—To *me,* in fact, he said little enough on any subject. It was only just as our carriage was announced, that he expressed a wish, in the most respectful manner, that the first time we met again, I would do him the honor to present him to you."

"Confound his impudence!" exclaimed Glorious John, in a tone that must have reached the coachman on the box.—"What on earth entitles him to make such a request?—What on earth have we in common?—Rank, fortune, principles,—all as dissimilar as noon and midnight!"

"There is nothing *very* analagous in you and Lord De Hauteford," argued Blanche; "yet he finds you dining at Hauteford House!"

"Between us, there is the bond of political sympathy. I am one of the spokesmen of Lord De Hauteford's party,—a party to which his Lordship's whole thoughts are devoted."

"The party had need be a strong one, not to sink under their weight!"—replied his wife, good-humoredly; and a sarcasm from her lips, however innocent, was so unprecedented an occurrence, that her husband could not forbear tracing it to the evil influence of her recent companionship.

Another dent!—Another silence!—broken at length by Blanche's entreaty that her dear John would not allow his prejudices against Lord Stokesleigh to betray him into discourtesy or illiberality, if, as she feared, his Lordship profited by his presentation to her, to leave a card at their door.

"*At my door,* as often as he pleases.—Nay, to gratify *you,* dear Blanche, I will certainly leave mine in return. But don't let him intrude further!—Don't let him presume further!"—

"I cannot fancy him likely either to presume or intrude," persisted Blanche, utterly unconscious of the irritation she was exciting. "I never saw a more gentlemanly man——"

"'The Prince of Darkness was a gentleman!'" quoted her husband.

"Indeed, you do poor Lord Stokesleigh too much honor!"—rejoined his wife, unable to re-

ist a smile. "When you know him, dear John, I am convinced you will agree with me, that, like the prince in question, he is painted blacker than he is.—The darkness of a man so sickly, so indolent, and so apathetic, can never have gone beyond twilight."

Luckily, her indignant husband was spared all occasion for a rejoinder, by the necessity of handing his wife out of the carriage at his own door.—But his sleep, that night, was unusually perturbed.—His dreams were haunted by a wild confusion of boa constrictors and sallow lords; the serpents standing on their tails to address the House of Lords on the abolition of the game laws, and the lords on their legs to bolt a milk-white-fawn, bearing a strange resemblance to his own Blanche.—When he rose to reply to the boa constrictors, he was coughed down by the House. When he endeavored to rescue his fawn, he was pinioned by the metropolitan police. It was in vain he tossed and turned and tried to sleep;—again, the same disquieting visions were renewed more painfully than before.

Lord De Hauteford's dinner, or guests, were manifestly too much for his digestion!—

At length having rushed into his dressing-room to slake his jealous fever in copious draughts of water, the Othello of the Birdcage Walk found himself contemplating the dappled sundawn of an April morning, over St. James's Park, where the first leaflets of spring were beginning to unclose; and, in spite of the pleasant objects that met his view, like his bronzed prototype, the Moor of Venice, the young M. P. was "perplexed in the extreme," by his jealous misgivings!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The concern evinced by the gossip of the *beau monde* for Lady Hartingham's unwarrantable prodigality, was a little premature. For the first time in her life, her coffers were overflowing; and though a person of moderate prudence would have hastened to apply the unexpected affluence which had befallen her, to the discharge of outstanding debts, it was scarcely to be expected of such people as Hart. and his wife, that, with seven thousand pounds placed to their account at Coutts's, they would not discover twenty thousand modes of scattering it to the winds.

Examination into the family documents, with a view to facilitate the raising of money for the payment of the children's fortunes, had brought to light, that, by a clause in the marriage settlements of Jeremiah Smith with the heiress of the Downhams, a fall of timber, to the amount of ten thousand pounds, was to take place every half century, in the fine oak-woods which constituted a valuable portion of the estate; and this privilege having been overlooked by Sir George, fell to the share of the present proprietor.

It was in vain that old Harman suggested to his clients the wisdom of applying this sum to the reduction of their encumbrances. All he obtained for his square-toed counsel, was a proposal that he should advance the cash in question, and undertake, at a certain percentage, the clearing of the timber: a speculation in which the Ipswich banker took care of course not to bring himself in a loser; and for which he found a pretext, in the eagerness expressed by the Hartinghams to square their accounts with Blanche and her husband. A mortgage was accordingly effected for the £10,000 apportioned to the two sisters; while the sum remaining after the repayment of the two thousand three hundred advanced by Harman on Blanche's account, was predestined to be frittered away in the pampering of those foolish whimsicalities which the Diamond of Downham called Taste!

Excited to more than her usual giddiness of frivolity, by the unexpected stroke of good fortune which had filled her purse to overflowing, Lady Hartingham's first ambition, after the discharge of her obligations to the Wattses, was to throw into the shade that lovely sister, whom she had so little expected to see emerge into the sunshine of fashionable life; and she accordingly spread her butterfly's wings to an extent which rendered their diaper of gold and purple almost too dazzling. The school of luxury into which, for a short period, she had been inaugurated in St. James's Square, had inspired her with an appetite for the gauds of life, such as becomes a passion in hearts empty of the warmer feelings of human nature.

That mellow Adonis, Lord Glastonbury, who, since the decease of the venerable prelate his father, had flourished among the withered spinsters, his sisters, in St. James's Square, like a superannuated Vert among the Visitandines, exhibited, on his first visit to Piccadilly, all the amazement of Aladdin in the magician's garden.

When Helen, with malice *prepense*, inquired what he had done towards refurnishing Glastonbury Castle, and proposed sending Sappy Savory to him, with a suit of Gobelins hangings, which she assured him were the very thing for his northern saloons and which he might have for a song, "something about eight hundred guineas," the pippin-faced earl, though he preserved a smiling countenance under the attack, felt in his pocket for his aromatic vinegar.

"You must bring Lady Ursula, Lady Mildred, and the rest of my cousins, here, some quiet day," added she, on perceiving that his complexion almost rivalled the greenness of his cravat. "I should like to show them my house."

"No, no, lady fair!" said he. "I must not have you infect my sisters with your Frenchified fancies. My sisters are simple country-girls, who have no right to vie in elegance with the beautiful and fashionable Lady Hartingham."

The counter-charm he muttered to himself, while afterwards taking his quotidian ramble, down Constitution Hill, on the subject of "vain, wild, wanton, wasteful, wilful, women, whose love to trumpery brought their families to ruin, and who deserved to die in an alms-

house," even had it been repeated to Lady Hartingham, would have given her small concern. For what mattered the croaking of this single bird of bad omen, compared with the chorus of warblings that saluted her day after day; the flatteries of Sir Horace Lumley, and the unctuous flummery of Lord Stokesleigh and Co.

Even these were scarcely needed to satisfy her that her pretty pony-phaeton was the pride of the Park; that the fitting up of her opera-box excited the pique of a hundred rivals; that at the French play, her joyous laugh was listened to in the *entr'acte* with almost as much eagerness as Doche's or Ozy's on the stage: that when she rode on horseback, the drive was deserted, and when she drove, the ride. With the single exception of the Delavals, the fashionable and foolish struggled for admittance into the circle of Lady Hartingham. It was cited as something new, something piquant. It was supposed to be a little Parisianized, whispered to be—*what?*—Nobody ventured to *say*,—but their smiles implied "a LEETLE short of correct and decorous." Female curiosity accordingly multiplied the number of the daughters of Eve who were candidates for a private view.

"What an unaccountable fellow is Stokesleigh!" said Sir Horace Lumley to Lord Efferville, whose plain roast venison and humble claret he was content to share, when more elaborate dinners were wanting. "It was he, you know, who brought the Hartinghams into fashion. And now they are established in a capital house of their own on an excellent footing, he is never seen within their doors."

"Stokesleigh is seen within no one's door, that I am aware of," said Lord Efferville, dryly. "Stokesleigh is like a brownie, whose haunts are only known by the works he leaves behind."

"Still, there is something almost mysterious in his coolness with Hart.! They used to be inseparable."

"Hartingham is throwing himself into politics!"

"Come, come, come!"

"I can only tell you that he was in the House of Lords till two in the morning, for the division on the Salt Bill; and the Duke of Warton told me yesterday, that Ministers were all but sure of him for the Land-tax question. He used, you know, to be against them;—and Stokesleigh has the credit of bringing him round."

"The more extraordinary, because Stokesleigh himself did not vote on the Salt Bill. He told me a day or two before, at dinner at the Dufresnes', that his mind was not made up."

"But you talk about Hartingham throwing himself into politics," said he, simply because Ministers, when hard-pressed once or twice, have hooked him in for a vote. But what think you, Eff., of Stokesleigh, a fellow who fancies it almost too much trouble to eat his dinner, a fellow who has about as much gusto for public life as I for Cape wine or Marsala, what think you of *Stokesleigh*, in the gallery of the House of Commons, three nights in the week, with a face as demure as a Sheriff's at a condemned sermon!"

"What do I think? Why, that you must be dreaming!" cried Efferville, quite as much astonished as his informant could desire; "unless, indeed, he did it for a wager!"

"I never pretend to judge people's motives," rejoined Sir Horace. "But I have no objection to bet a hundred with you or any man, that Stokesleigh is in the House of Commons at this moment; listening with as much eagerness as the youngest reporter or densest country gentleman present, to Watts's speech upon the Malt Tax."

"Does that come on to-night?" cried Efferville, with an air of chagrin; "I had promised myself the pleasure of hearing Watts's speech. I never miss *his* field-days, when I can help it. His family (excellent people) were our neighbors in Suffolk; and I have a great esteem for John Watts, with whom I was at college."

"Stokesleigh was not at college with him. Stokesleigh is ten years his senior. And Stokesleigh is the last man in the world to take a lesson even in politics, from any man breathing!" said Sir Horace. "Yet he is as constant in his attendance at Watts's show-offs, as if he were paid for it!"

"And why not?—What the deuce are you driving at, Lum.?"—cried Lord Efferville, his curiosity at length getting the better of him.

"At nothing. What *should* I be driving at? Only it is a little amusing to *me*, who belong, thank God, to neither of your Houses, to see Hart. turn Tory, and his preceptor in Conservatism going full gallop towards the Radicals!"

"Because he delights in the oratory of the member for Farnham! In that case, *I* am a Radical—and half the other members of the Carlton——"

"Not after Stokesleigh's fashion," resumed Sir Horace, looking more and more mysterious. "Stokesleigh's fit of liberalism came upon him one frosty day last January, after being nearly run over in a Suffolk lane by the pony chaise of John Watts's pretty wife."

Lord Efferville pushed back his chair, and sat contemplating Lumley with amazement. He had always known him for a tattler and tale bearer; but had not imagined it possible, that even his scandalous tongue would conjoin together two names so anomalous as those of the dissolute Stokesleigh and the Pearl of Downham Hall.

"You don't know John Watts' pretty wife, Lumley," said he, at length, "or you would not mention her in the same breath with Stokesleigh!"

"I intend her no disrespect," replied Sir Horace, a little surprised by his manner. "But, certain it is, that ever since Stokesleigh has known her, he has become an altered man."

"So much the better for *him*. *Any* change must be to his advantage!"

"Let the Duke of Warton hear you say *that!* Stokesleigh, like the city of London, sends four members to Parliament. Your

party may be as strong as Goliath, my dear Eff., but they can't afford to lose four votes."

"I did not say they could; but there is a vast difference between listening to John Watts's speeches, and voting against Government."

"Not in this case. I look on Stokesleigh as the most unscrupulous fellow breathing, where he has an aim in view."

"There I grant you."

"Stokesleigh would make drum-sticks of the cross-bones of *pere et mere*, and beat the 'Rogues' March' with them, if it forwarded his object!"

"But what *is* his object?" cried Efferville, impatiently: "why not say at once what *is* his object?"

"To become the bosom friend of Watts, as he used to be of Hartingham," replied Sir Horace, who, in the somewhat rigid house whose hospitality he was enjoying, did not venture to give the crude interpretation of his evil thoughts.

"Labor lost!" replied his host. "Watts would never admit such a man to his intimacy; and if he did, Stokesleigh would be so thoroughly out of his element in such honest company, that, like the cat in the air-pump,—

'Vainly would he strive
On joys too thin to keep his soul alive!'"

"Bravo, Eff.! I didn't think you such a scholar!" cried Lumley, who had no mind to pursue the subject further with so staunch a partisan of "Glorious John." But as he proceeded to take his coffee, previous to repairing to the opera, he was not the less satisfied in his own mind, that, if Stokesleigh pursued his system of attacking the vulnerable heel of the public man, by allowing himself to be gradually converted to his party, he would secure an entrance into the *bergerie*—and then, *gare aux loups!*

CHAPTER XXIX.

All that Sir Horace Lumley related to Lord Efferville, touching the new pursuits of his friend Hart., was strictly correct: but, though the truth, it was not the whole truth. Few people are at the trouble of searching into the motives of a man, whose life appears so aimless as Lord Hartingham's. The door that stands ever open, is supposed to lead to nothing worth locking up.

But, while displaying the *volto sciolto*, he possessed his *pensieri stretti* like another—and gloomy thoughts they were! Amid the hollow magnificence of his new establishment, he found himself, at five-and-twenty, a bankrupt in all the better treasures of the heart. The brilliancy of his wife whom he dared not love because he knew that she despised him, irritated his mind, as the perpetual flaring of a gas-lamp irritates the eyes.

Those years which, amid the painful leisure of Southwold, had been devoted by Blanche to the cultivation of her mind and the acquirement of new accomplishments, which, sharing the lessons she procured for poor Lou., became almost involuntarily her own, had been wasted by Helen in the company of scandal-mongers and *ennuyees*—who, like reptiles in a garden, crush or defile the flowers whose beauty and fragrance are lost on their sterile nature. Her hopes and fears were consequently invested in petty objects. The dew of romance, so reviving to the faded coloring of human life, had evaporated from her soul; and all elasticity of mind being worn down, her spirits were incapable of self-support. When not amused by the efforts of other people, she became a victim to *ennui*; and, like a mesmerist, the person overcharged with *ennui*, conveys its excess to those with whom he is *en rapport*. Nothing like the company of an individual who is bored, for effectually boring other people!

It was this monotony of spirit, this deficiency in the power of amusing and being amused, arising from the repleteness of a luxurious life, which had deprived Lady Hartingham of her attraction, not only in the eyes of her husband, but in those of the *roue* lord to whom, in her less prosperous days, the flashing lightning of her eyes, and even the thunder that followed, afforded a delightful excitement—the distraction of a disturbed soul often striking chords of feeling as delicious as those of an Æolian harp when swept by an angry breeze. The alternation of shade and sunshine, of piano and forte, in her humor, bestirred his apathy. Even the occasional crash of the avalanche or growl of the volcano, was better than the monotonous stillness of a waste.

"I don't dislike the sunshine of an unclouded sky," mused his lordship, as he went yawning one day out of Bodmin House, after a prolonged *siesta*, in which nothing but the silver-toned chiming of its gorgeous timepieces had marked the progress of the lagging hours. "But then, like the skies of Claude, it must shine over a genial and graceful landscape—not over a common flocked with geese, or a *potager* stocked with pot-herbs! When her pretty face has once fairly palled upon one, Lady Hartingham is a less pleasant companion than even her husband!"

On chancing, therefore, upon the company of the gentle Blanche—fairer, younger, and as pure from conventional influences as if she had been reared in the prairies—Lord Stokesleigh was captivated at sight. Lovely he had always thought her, from the first glimpse of her face in that hurried interview which had produced an indelible impression; but, he had never conjectured the existence of such perfect transparency of mind in combination with so much intellectual strength. Though the education bestowed by Mrs. Temple had left her where it left Helen—in a state of darkness, the more hopeless from bearing the name of enlightenment—the care with which her lonely hours at Southwold had been supplied with books by the Wattses, old and young, had fully qualified her for companionship with the husband who was waiting to establish her as the idol of his fireside.

But even this was not all. As the fertile Lebanon produces not only the lofty cedar but

the fairest lilies of the field, in Blanche's mind all that was sweet combined with all that was noble. As passionate a votary of the arts as was compatible with his epicurean indolence, Stokesleigh was astonished to find her not only far better informed than himself in the schools of painting, but a delicate and instinctive critic. On such subjects she talked with perfect simplicity, yet "far above singing;" and Lord Stokesleigh—several exquisite pictures from whose family collection were included that season in the exhibition of the works of the old masters in the British Gallery—felt that he had never half understood their merits till he heard them discussed by the lips of the eloquent Blanche.

But her powers of fascination extended further still. With the exception of her sister Louisa, it was difficult to be a more exquisite musician. Never have Handel or Mozart found sweeter interpreters than those youthful votaries, who, to a profound study of the science, united the charm of an organ—wanting which, science is in vain. And after hearing Mrs. Watts, therefore, accompany herself in one of Handel's sweetest solos, as Handel's solos were perhaps never given in this country except by Mrs. Bates—and afterwards repeat some stanzas of Burns, admirably melodized by her sister Louisa—he could not but feel, that to have such a St. Cecilia ever at his orders, would be an enjoyment greater than mortal has a right to expect.

Everybody present at a concert at Delaval House, (where Mrs. Watts took pity on the Duchess of Dumfries' embarrassment at the unexpected absence of her *prima donna*, who had been sent for to the palace,) was rapturous in applause; but Lord Stokesleigh said not a syllable. Such a performance deserved more than the vulgar tribute of common-place praise; and he went straight home afterwards, instead of repairing, as usual, to his club—that nothing might weaken the delicious impression he had received.

And when he came to reflect that this lovely and loving woman—pure as a Roman matron, gifted as a muse, and, above all, quiet, unassuming, and feminine as an English gentlewoman—had been within his reach—in a position to have done honor to his rank and princely fortune, instead of becoming the wife of a nameless lawyer, having to push his way in the world—he was not likely to be particularly in charity with Lady Hartingham, who had done so little to promote an acquaintance between him and her sister.

Still, he fancied that though too late for happiness so supreme as to have made her his wife, he might yet enhance the pleasures of his jaded life by cultivating the friendship of people so much to his taste as John Watts and his wife. As Blanche had truly observed, the world had always done him the honor to paint as black, a complexion that was only tawny—ascribing the qualities of a fiend to one who was merely selfish and sensual; the gossips of the coteries having as much exceeded the truth in imputing criminality to his reckless intimacy with the Hartinghams, as they were now beginning to exaggerate his evil intent, in endeavoring, by all the means in his power, to render himself acceptable in the Birdcage Walk.

It was true he had sat out, in the gallery of the House of Commons, three of John Watts's speeches; whose united length, as the newspapers would say, amounted to fourteen hours, thirteen minutes and a half. It was true, that, by judicious card-leaving at the houses where they were intimate, he contrived to be asked to meet the Wattses at dinner, once or twice in the week. It is true he submitted to be outargued by the husband and overlooked by the wife; and was evincing such unmistakeable symptoms of political instability, that the sagacious Mawman counted confidently on his conversion. But all this was done and suffered with no fouler views than the desire of recommending himself to the friendship of one of the first men of his time; and a woman, whose society was delightful to him, and whose ill-opinion of him he was desirous to change.

To persuade the London world that such was the extent of his projects, he cared little to attempt.

There was, however, one spectator of his proceedings, who judging them with the utmost mistrust, regarded him with a jealous eye. Sir Horace's jesting remark, that Hart. was throwing himself into politics, was so far true, that, by coalescing with Stokesleigh's former colleagues, he trusted to be placed in the secret of his movements. For Blanche, and even for her husband, he entertained a sincere regard. All that the world beheld in his cousin—all that she was daily and hourly proving herself to be—seemed to raise him in his own estimation. That in early boyhood he should have been the first to discern her merits, was creditable to his judgment; and, though from the day of pledging his faith to Helen, he had regarded her only as a sister, yet *as* a sister, he loved her so dearly, and entertained so reverent a sense of her superiority, that the idea of her fair fame being injured by the notoriety of Stokesleigh's attentions, filled him with disgust and indignation.

That she could be morally injured by them, he did not one moment do her the injury of supposing. He knew Blanche. Not even her husband did ampler justice to her purity of thought, word, and deed. Still, he believed it more than probable, that her ignorance of the world might in some way or other entangle her; and that, ere she was aware of it, some slur might impair her good name, such as worlds could never restore. And the sacrifice of his own household-happiness had taught him a terrible lesson! No one was better cognizant than the husband of the thoughtless Helen, of the influence often exercised by the idle words of two or three still idler men in a club window. Nobody knew better the mischief that may be done by a clique of frivolous women; who, by their tone of pronouncing a name, their smiles while pronouncing it, or even their significance in omitting it altogether when it has a claim to mention,—possess the power of conveying slight,—reproach,—nay

infamy,—without incurring the penalties of the law!

He was excusable, therefore, for watching, in all sincerity of anxious love, the unsuspecting movements gradually bringing the beautiful wife of John Watts within the baneful circle of the world's bewitchments. That the part he had been compelled by Helen to adopt towards the Wattses, forced him to stand at bay while exercising his vigilance, was a trial of patience. But he did not watch the less arduously, for watching at a distance.

Among those whom he noticed as sincerest among her new associates, in regard for the gentle Pearl, was Lady Rochester; a woman who retained as a matron courted by courtiers and feted by the fashionable, the same frank character which had alarmed Sir George Downham, when she figured in Curzon Street, as one of the tall, handsome, unmarried daughters of Sir Felix Pomeroy. Though the frigid character of her cousin Martha had kept at a distance her own family as well as her family by marriage, there was a cordiality, a strong sense of consanguinity in the nature of the Pomeroys; and when Lady Downham fell into adversity, they offered their services to one who in prosperity showed herself so ungrateful. Her circumstances had not been such as to require pecuniary aid. But the explanations she was forced to give when it was tendered, placed both Lady Rochester and her sister Sophia, completely *au fait* to the generous sacrifices of Blanche for the benefit of her family.

Soon after the marriage of the Wattses, Lady Downham and Louisa had been their guests, while the former was transacting business in London, connected with the administration of Sir George's estate; and it was then that Lady Rochester and Lady Dowdeswell —(for Sophia's rising lawyer had progressed into a placeman and a peer!) in making acquaintance with Martha's fair, but deformed daughter, heard from her grateful lips all that Blanche had been to her; and while learning to love the gifted girl, learned also to reverence the angelic sister who was the object of her worship.

While, therefore, Lady Dowdeswell undertook the defence of John Watts's bride in those professional circles which the brilliancy of her *debut* in fashionable life had somewhat indisposed against her, Lady Rochester, a woman on whose character no evil word had ever dared to breathe, and whose high position in the Household imparted a certain authority to her conduct, was seen to be in habits of such friendly intimacy with "that beautiful Mrs. Watts, who sings so charmingly, wife of the man who makes those famous speeches,"—that the malice of a Lady Sophia Dufresne,—(an elf in person—an imp in nature,)—was forced to seek some safer prey. Even Lady De Hauteford was checked in making too great a parade of her patronage, on finding in the wife of Lord Carlingford's *protege*, the friend of her bosom friend.

"The step-daughter, sir, of my cousin-german. One to whom my family are under the greatest obligations," was her reply to a member of the royal family, on being interrogated concerning the beautiful woman who had been her companion the preceding night at the Ancient Concert: while Lord Rochester, who, though a fashionable, was a plain-spoken man, saved himself a world of trouble by answering a hundred idle questioners at the clubs, concerning "that new woman—that pretty Mrs. Watts"—with "my wife's cousin, a person for whom Lady Rochester and myself have the highest regard."

It was consequently to the Rochesters and Dowdeswells, that Lord Hartingham endeavored to draw near, in pursuance of his guardianship over Blanche, since with her all intercourse was out of the question. But this was not so easy to accomplish. For though (the obscurity of the Downhams being such as to keep their family affairs out of view) their Suffolk neighbors alone were aware of the relationship between the Diamond and the Pearl, the Rochesters were of course better informed; and, loving and admiring Blanche Watts, could understand no cause of family disagreement sufficiently cogent to justify Lady Hartingham's estrangement.

Still, there was no plea for declining the acquaintance of an agreeable man of the world, whom the Rochesters were in the constant habit of meeting.

Laura Howard, the recently presented daughter of Lord and Lady Rochester, was one of the happiest results of the system which is gaining ground over the ruins of the high-pressure education school. She had been encouraged to learn, but not crammed with learning; and being a girl of intelligent mind and fine temper, had progressed from a charming child into a still more charming young woman, to be an ornament to society, as well as the delight of her father's fireside.

In *her* cordial heart, the peculiar position of her cousin Louisa had excited a strong interest. Young, handsome, admired, she could enter warmly into the feelings of a girl of her own years, who, possessed of such rare talents and a countenance so attractive, was still debarred the pleasures of her age, or any hope of surrounding herself with those dearer ties which enable a woman to dispense with them. And it was her reverence for the kind and wise sister who had taught to poor Louisa the invaluable lesson of placing her happiness in higher objects, and creating for herself a sphere of her own, which rendered the Rochesters peculiarly alive to the merits of Blanche.

It was a real satisfaction to Lady Rochester, that, after the departure of Lou. and Lady Downham from town, the intimacy which had sprung up between the cousins continued to recommend her daughter to the good will of Mrs. Watts; for there was no one with whom she was better pleased to see her associate.

Till Blanche's arrival in town, Lady Rochester had always felt anxious when her turn in waiting prevented her fulfilling the duties of a chaperon. But her place in the Household was relieved from its only drawback, now that she could place her dear Laura under the care of one from whom she would learn no vulgar

scandals, no flashy witticisms, no unworthy tactics; Lord Rochester, like all men of manly character, regarding with unfeigned disgust the missish manœuvrings and set phrases of the girls of the day.

Even with her own sister, Lady Rochester was less pleased to leave her, than with Blanche. For Lady Dowdeswell, instead of having, like herself, "one fair daughter whom she loved passing well," had unluckily six; and having been of course compelled to resign so large a brood to the hands of a governess.

It was by General Pomeroy, (the quondam Coldstream Captain, of whom their cousin Martha was the Patty, now a smoke-dried, well-got-up old beau,) an old brother officer of his father, that Lord Hartingham was presented to the Rochesters.

"I have no objection to introduce *you*, my dear Lord Hartingham," said the stiff old beau. "As a married man you entail no responsibility. But with the introduction of partners I am careful never to meddle. One goes in peril for the rest of one's days, for having brought forward some *parti* who does not propose, or some detrimental who does. You, on the contrary, are a safe man. You are no longer an object of suspicion. You have done your best and your worst, eh? A man can't be tried twice for the same offence, or drawn a second time for the militia. So come along with me to Rochester House!"

CHAPTER XXX.

From the moment of discovering, soon after her first acquaintance with Lord Stokesleigh at Hauteford House, that it was unacceptable to her husband, Blanche made up her mind to receive his lordship's overtures so coolly as to prevent all approach to intimacy. She regretted it; for he seemed more amusing than the common run of "men of wit and pleasure about town." But the society of George Selwyn and Horace Walpole, blended into one, would not in her estimation have been worth the purchase of one uneasy hour to her husband.

The sacrifice was easily made. Indisposition, consequent on her situation, kept her further and further aloof from the fashionable throng.

Had she been involved in the intimacies of a wider circle—more especially if at all resembling that of which Lady Hartingham formed the centre—where no one's feelings are spared, and no subjects thought too delicate or too personal for discussion, a whisper might have reached her ear that John Watts's high renown was a little on the decline. The pinnacle of fame he had attained at the period of his marriage, rendered it scarcely possible to make the slightest movement that had not a downward tendency. The partisans who had halloed and shouted in his honor till they were hoarse, wanted a little respite; and it was consequently a relief when, by the civil mention he was beginning to obtain from the Tories, his own party perceived that his prodigious popularity was on the wane, and that he no longer struck terror into his adversaries.

Though no one ventured directly to tax him with failure, the keen perception of John Watts soon discovered that he had lost in popular estimation; by the impertinent familiarity of blockheads who had hitherto kept their distance, and the pleasant air of the majority of his acquaintance. On his recent speeches, many congratulated him with shaking of hands and sparkling of eyes, who had passed over his grander triumphs without notice. And though he assured himself that the thing was perfectly immaterial to him, that laurel leaves are perishable trash, and that the "fickle breath of popular applause" is the foulest of gases—he missed the cheers of the House—he missed the sesquipedalian bombast of great letter commendation! After seeing his name intermingled in the newspapers with all the biggest words in the language, it was hard to read that "the honorable member for Farnham made a weak and rambling speech, of which nothing deserved to be remembered but a quotation from Bacon; an author whom Mr. Watts had often on his lips, but would do far better to treasure in his understanding." After which lofty castigation, all the pygmies of the press came hopping out of their holes to tie down Gulliver in their petty bondage, and tickle and torment him with their puny darts.

All this, however superior he might feel to his antagonists, did not tend to place him on a pleasanter footing with himself. Though not vain of his previous triumphs, he had been proud of them.

The name, the wretched picture and worse bust,

had afforded him no intrinsic pleasure; but he knew that a mere allusion to them could bring tears into the eyes of the old couple at the Lodge, and cause the heart of his darling Blanche to sing for joy. Bankruptcy in such treasures would consequently be harder to bear, than loss of fortune had been to Sir George Downham, or the loss of her beauty to his more sparkling child.

He was accordingly learning to touch his hat to the editors of the daily papers, and uncover respectfully to those of the leading reviews. He began to appreciate the value of fame—the importance of public opinion.

He was beginning to watch anxiously the faces of his friends. He thought twice before he crossed the threshold at Brookes's, after he had been speaking. The sight of Lord Carlingford as far off as Canning's statue, when he was emerging from the House, made him feel as if a bucket of Thames' water had been thrown down his back.

Such was the state of John Watts's feelings at the moment judiciously selected by Lord Stokesleigh to recommend himself to his acquaintance; and the deferential tone in which the ex-Chatham found himself accosted by a man whose arrogance of mind was proverbial, proved soothing as the most healing balm over whose curative properties the Stamp Office ever extended its protection. After they had talked together for an hour in one of the

deeply-embayed windows of L— House, John Watts could not help feeling that the man had been strangely belied. *He* could not perceive a grain of *hauteur* or self-conceit about him! On the contrary, he had rarely met with a person more candid or more open to conviction. His information, too, was remarkable. There was, unquestionably, the making, in Lord Stokesleigh, of a first-rate man.

Achilles had his vulnerable heel: why not John Watts? The homage paid by Stokesleigh to his talents, coming at a time when every day was marked by the defalcation of some former partisan, it appeared welcome as the flowering of the Glastonbury thorn when all other trees are leafless. He was pleased to see that intellectual looking face stationed, sedate, and attentive, in the gallery whenever he attempted one of those masterly speeches which, by losing their gloss of novelty, had lost their charm for the vulgar. It was inspiriting, it was encouraging to know that *one* candid and enlightened hearer was present.

When conversing, one evening at Brookes's, with the old blue and buff Marquis of Dorchester, being rash enough to quote as an apothegm of Lord Stokesleigh, what *ought* to have been attributed to Sir James Macintosh, that "men think according to their opinions, but act according to their habits," he found by a sudden reproof, that his acquaintance with Stokesleigh had not passed unobserved.

"I am sincerely sorry to find such a name so often in your mouth, my dear Mr. Watts!" remonstrated the pompous Marquis. "You are a young man, my dear sir, a very young man; and are, perhaps, imprudent to risk yourself in the company of one of such loose principles, both social and political.

John Watts stood breathless with surprise.

"Permit me to remind you, my dear sir," continued the elderly lord, "that the Lord Stokesleigh, whose opinions appear to influence you, is one of the staunchest adherents of the most corrupt government which, since Walpole's time, ever polluted the Treasury bench. I leave it to your own good sense to determine whether the companionship of such a man does you honor."

The hot blood rushed to the brow of John Watts at this rebuke. *He*, to stand publicly reproved by a man who, but for his grey hairs and the coronet that covered them, he would not have scrupled to qualify as an old blockhead! A glance round the room sufficed to satisfy him, by the over-acted attention which Lord de Hauteford, Lord Carlingford, and several other of his champions who were present, affected to rivet on the newspapers in their hands, that they both heard and approved.

It was just then an epoch of transition. Several great public conversions had been recently effected by the changes of the times and the extended experience those changes created, followed by the usual vulgar outcry against apostacy. Many were on the alert to find in John Watts's speeches some slight fluctuation of the needle. Two debates from which he had pointedly absented himself,—two questions on which, from scruples of conscience he had declined to vote, were growlingly cited against him by his party. What *he* called conscience, *they* call the influence of Lord Stokesleigh; and jealous of possessing his whole soul, as Othello Desdemona's, they decided that they would

> Rather be a toad
> And feed upon the vapor of a dungeon,
> Than keep a corner of the man they lov'd
> For Tory uses.

In order, therefore, to secure him for their own, and render the society of the witty lord they abominated as distasteful to him as possible, they made it a point to accost him with surly faces and mistrustful reserves. For one hand now extended to welcome him at the House or his club, there had been twenty the preceding session!

Jealous husbands and jealous parties, as Byron sings,—

> "Those tyrants, teasing, tempting to rebel,
> Deserve the fate their peevish lips foretell."

And so it came to pass, that John Watts, harrassed and hectored on the subject of his acquaintance with a "corrupt conservative," was almost bullied into becoming his friend:—his own intimates leaving ample room for the progress of such a friendship, by clearing away a space for the growth of the branches and extension of the roots.

All this was watched with some anxiety by the Pearl. His vacillation of judgment concerning the merits of Lord Stokesleigh, surprised her much, and shocked her a little. Unsuspicious that it was a mere impulse of jealousy, which in the first instance motived his dislike, she regretted to notice his abdication of an opinion so strongly expressed. The Stokesleigh he had arraigned as vile and worthless, was the same man on whose arm he was now seen leaning; and whom he occasionally brought home with him to consult some favorite author, or search out some note or precedent in that *sanctum sanctorum*,—that cheerful sunshiny breakfast-room,—of which her paintings were the ornament, and where the very atmosphere revealed the charm of her presence.

To such visits, Blanche gave no encouragement. After discovering real inconsistency in the conduct of her husband, she no longer relied implicitly upon his judgment.

The admiration of Lord Stokesleigh, meanwhile, was increased a thousand fold, by the dignified serenity of her indifference. Courted as he was, both by the influence of his Crœsusship and the charm of his conversation, it was something new to him to enter a house where the mistress, though young and beautiful, so often excused herself from appearing; and who, when he implored permission to send his finest pictures for her to copy, declined the offer, on the plea of not choosing to expose such valuable property to the risks of removal. When he contrasted her conduct with that of her sister Helen, who, from nearly the commencement of their acquaintance had dealt with his goods and chattles as though they were her own, and usurped the disposal of his interest and influence almost in his own despite, he was justified in his opinion that, when he had so

successfully endeavored, eight years before in Paris, to obliterate by dissipation from the heart of Lady Mary Hartley's son, the impression made on it by his younger cousin, his interference, which had been the eventual means of transferring his choice from the Pearl of Downham to the Diamond, had inflicted a severe injury upon poor Hartingham.

The season and session were now drawing to a close; and Blanche began to look forward to release from the panting metropolis and the refreshment of her native air; to a visit to Southwold, which was to render her dear Lou. the happiest of sisters, and a sojourn at the Lodge, which was to render the Squire and his wife the proudest of parents; when, one day, as she was beguiling a solitary morning in the breakfast-room, by running through the scores of the Messiah and Creation,—the favorite music of her good mother-in-law, which she knew would be required of her every evening at the Lodge,—Lord Stokesleigh was suddenly ushered in by her husband.

They had walked together from the House of Commons, in order that John Watts might afford proof to his companion, by reference to his annotated copy of Vattel, of the incorrectness of a precedent quoted by the Foreign Secretary. His books of this class were mostly kept at his chambers. But he had brought home the volume in question, some days before, with a special view to the impending debate.

While he proceeded to seek it in his private study, with a few remarks he had drawn up on the question, Stokesleigh remained with his wife; not a little overjoyed to have found her, for once, established in that pleasant-room where he had so often waited for her in vain. It was impossible not to tell her so. It was difficult not to add, that, throughout the palaces and noble residences of the metropolis, he knew not the chamber to compare with it;—adorned as it was by her genius, and perfected by her presence.

"It is true, as you said just now," she replied, "that many opportunities have not been afforded you of improving our acquaintance. Still, Lord Stokesleigh, I should have thought you might have *guessed* me better than to suppose me gratified by compliments of this common-place nature."

"It is not my fault that I am forbidden to make them more particular," said he, with an air of pique. "If you despise me for saying too little, you would loathe me for saying too much."

On this bold hint, poor Blanche, who had not quitted the music stool on his entrance, began to feel that music would be a safer occupation than dialogue; and little as she was accustomed to volunteer a display of her skill, began playing a motet of Palestrina, which justified the proverb, that "novelty is only that which has been forgotten," by proving wholly new to her companion. His ear was captivated in a moment by those solemn and striking chords; and if John Watts forgot how the moments were passing while searching through dusty files of papers, Lord Stokesleigh was not likely to take more heed of the lapse of time as he lounged in that pleasant apartment, shaded by lofty elm-trees, and commanding a platform of fragrant flower-beds, with heavenly harmonies breathing in his ear. Both had completely lost sight of themselves:—Blanche entranced in her music, and Stokesleigh in *her*:—when open flew the door, and in stalked the Duchess of Dumfries, with Lady Augusta following, perpendicular as the Duke of York's column wandering from its pedestal!

Unembarrassed by a position of which her less pure minded sister would have felt the awkwardness, Blanche rose to greet her noble guests. But ere she could open her lips, the Duchess, with a ruffled air, was pouring forth incoherent apologies.

"I have really your pardon to ask," said she, "for having taken the liberty to distrust your butler's assertion, that you were 'not at home.' Had he said 'engaged,' I would not have ventured to intrude. It is always better to give the right *consigne* on such occasions."

"As I informed your Grace last night at Lady Marian's," replied Blanche, calmly, "that I should remain at home to day, to nurse myself for our Richmond party to-morrow, I concluded that 'not at home' would stand for 'wishing to be quiet.'"

An angry glance at Lord Stokesleigh formed so significant a retort, that Blanche replied in her turn by ringing the bell.

"Inform your master," said she, to the servant who answered it, "that Lord Stokesleigh is waiting to know whether he has found the papers; and that the Duchess of Dumfries and Lady Augusta Delaval are with me."

Her Grace looked a little surprised, and considerably pacified. The fiery character of John Watts, was sufficiently understood among those so intimate with him as his cousin Ralph Holcombe, to make it clear that, under the same roof with *him*, no evil could be contemplated. The Duchess, determined, however, to take an early opportunity of making "this imprudent young woman understand that even evil appearances ought to be guarded against; and that if Cæsar's wife must not be suspected, it would be as well for the wife of the Honorable Member for Farnham to keep equally clear of scandal." Meanwhile, she heaved a sanctimonious sigh, and wished the world was not so wicked as to make it necessary for innocent sheep to appear in sheep's clothing over their own wool; and sat indignantly eying Lord Stokesleigh, who preserved under her Gorgon gaze the stolidity of aspect he could so well assume, while inquiring of Lady Augusta whether the Duke of Dumfries had not left town for the Agricultural Meeting; with an air of as much interest as if his soul were absorbed in gigantic turnips and the revolving plough.

"I concluded the Duke was to be there," said he, with an air of well-acted naivete, "the moment I heard of this Richmond party! I always observe when heads of families leave town, at this season of the year, to attend to their yeoman cavalry or agricultural shows, that a sudden gettting up of Greenwich, Richmond, and Vauxhall excursions announces their departure!"

This insulting reference was luckily lost upon the Duchess; who was accomplishing the object of her visit by whispering an entreaty to Blanche, that "she would use her influence over her husband's charming friend, Mr. Mawman, who had excused himself from Richmond."

In the midst of her negociations, to which Lady Augusta turned a decorously deaf ear, the servant returned with Mr. Watts's compliments to Lord Stokesleigh, and having laid his hand on the papers, he was expecting his Lordship in his study;—and, lo! after a formal bow —that included the three ladies, saints and sinners, the delinquent withdrew. But when the Duchess found herself alone with Blanche, —Blanche so pure, so feminine,—whose serene face resembled at all times that of a good angel,—she would no more have ventured to take her to task for a fault implying lightness of conduct, than Lord Carlingford would have dared inform her husband that the clubs decided the wings of his genius to be moulting!

CHAPTER XXXI.

Lucky that the season was drawing to a close!—for the world was just beginning to perceive and wonder at the coolness between the Lady Hartingham and Mrs. Watts, who, strange as it might appear, had once been attached sisters! But though one or two malice-mongers of more acuminated spite than the rest, such as Lady Sophia Dufresne and Sir Horace Lumley, pointed at Lord Stokesleigh as the apple of discord, the majority decided that it was only one of the ten thousand cases in which the death of the head of the family creates dissension among its members.

"They had doubtless quarrelled about some clause in their father's will."

"Far better thus!" mused Blanche, after learning from Lady Marian Holcombe that such was the general impression. "When a reconciliation takes place, people will have less to say about it, than if they knew the scorn that Helen has heaped upon my husband. Take place, however, it must! As soon as we are in the country, I will go straight to the Hall, and surprise my dear sister into the indulgence of her natural feelings. That she loves me still, I am convinced; however, the world may have wrought upon her nature. And the event which, in September, will either perfect my happiness in this world, or remove me to a better, shall not find me at variance with my sister!"

For now the period was approaching, the sadness with which even the livelier Helen contemplated an event which had deprived their mother of life, sat heavy on her spirits.

All despondency and all weakness disappeared, however, within a few days of their establishment at the Lodge. The cheering influence of country air over one to whom the London atmosphere had proved as trying as it usually is to the country-bred, was instantaneous. But still more restorative was the affectionate cordiality of her welcome. To watch the delight with which the worthy old couple surveyed their idolized son, and listen to the self-gratulation with which they anticipated the new generation about to be added to their house, was a real pleasure. It was indeed gratifying that they should consider her worthy to be the wife of one for whom they evidently thought the round world itself hardly great enough to afford a footstool!

And then it was so pleasant to be led round the farm and grounds by old Pro.; and find that one of his favorite foals had been named "Lady Blanche," and another "the Pearl:"—that some fine old elms, to which she had objected in the winter, as excluding a view of Doesbury church, had already disappeared;—and that a new dairy had been built among the cedar-trees in the spot pointed out by herself. The care taken by the Squire while exhibiting all this, not to tire or excite his darling daughter-in-law, was twice as great as that lavished by poor old Lord Glastonbury, nearly thirty years before, on his hapless Emily. And with how different a purpose! The sole anxiety of the Earl was to obtain an heir to the Hartingham title;—whereas the Wattses would have infinitely preferred a girl, in whom to exemplify the theories of their talented friend Euphrasia. But even to secure a Phœnix, they would not had a hair fall to the ground from the head of their treasured Pearl.

They longed to tell her so, when, with moistened eyes and glowing hearts, they exhibited, adjoining her own cheerful apartments, the nursery they had newly fitted up. And such a nursery,—so perfect in contrivance and so abounding in comfort! But her mother-in-law was too wise to advert to even the possibility of danger. It was only the poor fussy Squire who suggested it, by his constant assurance that old Barker was perfectly to be trusted, "a most experienced man, who had attended her from her infancy—nay, and her mother before her—that, may be, Lady Emily's life might have been spared, had she remained at Downham Hall!"

Whenever he touched on this chapter, his wife took him gently by the arm, and led him away. But she could not always check him when he got upon the subject of Downham Hall.

"Bless your dear heart," said he to his daughter-in-law, when out of hearing of his son,—"you think so much of the Swiss dairy and flower garden I've had such delight in making for you,—and of a few chairs and presses bought for the west wing, for a little somebody who's coming, who shall be nameless! But what would you say, I wonder, if you saw how things are turned upside down at the old Hall! First, they've been widening the lake, and making a cut into it from the Warsden brook. Then, the hill has been lowered that used to shut out the view of the Holms from the front of the house; a good six hundred pounds *that* job will cost them, if it costs a penny! But the grand affair, Pearl, an affair that will bring people from these counties round about to look at, is the new conservatory."

"A *new* conservatory!" said Blanche. "I understood that considerable additions had been

made to the old one, last year? Do you remember how Mr. Mawman extolled its beauties?"

"Ay, ay! But last year was last year! My lady must needs have something new to astonish her visitors. And so she has built what I call a palace for the princes of the glass slipper;—yes, my dear, a palace,—with a dome, and fountains, and tanks, and gravel walks, and I don't know what,—which is to contain palm trees, and banyan trees, and cinnamon trees; so that when you are breakfasting there, you might fancy yourself at Bermuda, or Ceylon!"

"What a costly fancy! Still, anything is desirable that serves to render Downham more agreeable to my sister and her husband."

"I don't hear that his Lordship interferes much in such matters. People *do* say, hereabouts, that he's a trifle henpecked. On *one* point, however, he has certainly an opinion of his own. In spite of my Lady's incivilities, I never chance to run against him on the road, when he's staying at the Hall, but off goes his hat, and he won't let me pass him without stopping to hear that he hopes Mrs. Watts is well, and that I've good news from my son and his cousin Blanche."

"Hartingham is the most inconsistent person——," murmured his 'cousin Blanche.' "However, it is a comfort to know, that when I make my move for a reconciliation, *he* will place no obstacle in the way."

"Why, you're surely not thinking, Pearl," cried the Squire, "of getting yourself slapped in the face by your sister? You're surely not thinking of putting us all in the way of an affront?"

"I will do nothing, dear sir, that displeases you. But if I were to tell you, that I should not be half happy in becoming a mother, unless I had previously shaken Helen by the hand?"

"Why, if you were to tell me *that*, my darling," replied the cordial old man, "I should propose harnessing *myself* into the pony chaise, to drag you over to the Hall! But you'll have a harder matter with John! John's a noble fellow, with the heart of an emperor. But he's touchy, is John, and obstinate—deuced obstinate! However, if you only look him in the face with one of the smiles you gave me just now, and speak to him in the same dear voice, he must be a greater brute than I take him for, if he finds it in his heart to say you nay."

Two days afterwards, a "Bless my soul!" from John Watts, as he was reading the Morning Chronicle at the breakfast-table, produced a general appeal for explanation. Old Pro. surmised a change of ministry. Mrs. Pro. the announcement of "a 20th thousand of Matronhood Considered." Blanche suspected, and with reason, that his ejaculation regarded her sister.

Before she had time to make the inquiry, the paragraph which had excited her husband's surprise, was read aloud for the benefit of the party. "We learn that Lord and Lady Hartingham sailed yesterday for the Levant, in their new yacht, the Nereid. His Lordship's seat in Suffolk being in process of repair, it is probable they will spend the winter at Naples; one of the objects of their cruise in the Mediterranean being to collect rare exotics for the magnificent conservatory now erecting at Downham Hall."

"A yacht!—Another piece of folly and extravagance!"—cried John Watts. "Before the year is out, we shall have them keeping a balloon!"—

His father set up a hearty laugh,—speedily checked by the uplifted finger of his wife;—following the indication of whose glance, they saw that Blanche was pale as death from faintness and emotion. In a moment, her husband's hand was extended towards her.—Then came a relieving burst of tears,—and an exclamation of, "How shall I ever forgive myself!—She has left England, unreconciled!—I shall perhaps see her no more!"

"A thousand and a thousand times, my dear child!" cried the Squire, perceiving that the usually eloquent tongue of his son was mute from surprise.—"Absence will bring her round.—Absence will do all the good in the world.—Foreign travel often helps to bring highflying folks to their senses.—When Lady Hartingham comes back, Pearl, and finds you with a pretty little daughter sitting on your knee, she'll kneel down before you and bless you both, as *we* shall!"

"I mustn't have you fret, my own Blanche," said her husband. "In the first place, these newspapers always exaggerate. Ten to one but the Hartinghams are gone like other yatchers, at this season, on a cruise; and will be back again by Christmas."

His wife incredulously shook her head.

"And you have the happy certainty of Louisa's company, whenever you like to ask for it. Lady Downham will be rejoiced to have her safe out of the way, at the Lodge, while she is paying the round of visits she talks of, to the Rochesters, Dowdeswells, and the whole scattered tribe of Pomeroy."

At that hope, a ray of mental sunshine seemed to create a rainbow in the tearful eyes of Blanche.

"Do not fancy that I want comfort!" said she. "I possess everything the heart of woman can desire. It was almost as much for Helen's sake as for my own, that I wished to be with her on the same happy terms as of old. I did not want to leave on her conscience the weight of our estrangement."

John Watts, in deference to his wife's feelings, suppressed the retort which rose to his lips, that "Helen's conscience was charged enough already to bear a trifling additional weight without suffering."

"I'll tell you one advantage we shall all derive from this absence of our neighbors from the Hall," observed the Squire, perceiving that Blanche was again sinking into a reverie. "We shall be able to cut across the park to Doesbury, as we used, without scruple,—instead of swallowing a whole desert of dust on the high road. Even you, my dear child, will not mind showing your face there *now*. For not one of the old servants or hangers-on is left at the Hall. Your poor father's departure and the Efferville's tenancy, effectually broke up the concern."

Poor Blanche listened, and made no sign.—She was too discouraged to look forward with pleasure to any effort or any change.

Some days afterwards, however, having been coaxed by the Squire into accompanying him in the pony-chaise, for a visit of ceremony to Doesbury Rectory, old Pro., without asking further permission, drove her straight into the park; and when she had recovered the first startle of finding herself in a spot so dear to her recollection, to which, for more than six years past, she had been a stranger, the Squire had every reason to rejoice in the success of his manœuvre. Her emotions, however great, were always of a gentle kind; as an acacia-tree, however ruffled by the breeze, can scatter nothing but blossoms.

The tears that stole down her cheeks as she surveyed the haunts where her childhood was passed, were such as became a woman who feels that, however dear her reminiscences of early affection, still dearer is the house of her matronhood,—still more holy the ties by which her maturer years are environed. Never had she been loved at the Hall as under the homelier roof of the good old Squire!

Some such avowal escaped her lips amidst her tears; and rendered the venerable man by her side the happiest of fathers-in-law.

By degrees, they wound towards the house. There was no obstacle to the visit. The proprietors of the Hall being thousands of miles distant, the workmen about the premises were cap in hand to "Squire Watts;" who was respected in the neighborhood as the most liberal of landlords, and best of men.

"If the lady would like to have a walk in the gardens, Sir," said one of the men, approaching the chaise, "the gates are open, and you knows the ways of the place. I'll have an eye to the pony, Sir, while you're gone." No objection being offered by Blanche, she found herself, a few minutes afterwards, leaning on the arm of the Squire, in the formal French gardens which now replaced the shrubberies where, in her abandoned childhood, she used to run hand-in-hand with Helen, under the vigilant eye of Nurse Whitfield; or spend hour after hour under the great cedar-trees, reading to her little infirm sister.

The spot was hardly recognizable. Helen had done her best to obliterate every trace of those bygone days. Nothing remained of them but the cedar with its sweeping boughs instinct with kindly recollections:—that lordly tree alone maintainining any degree of proportion with the crystal palace which stood there in ærial lightness, still awaiting the trees and plants that were to endow it with a purpose.

In the fragrant flower-gardens adjoining the house, but wasting their sweetness on the desert air, Blanche was glad to rest on a rustic bench commanding a view of her former home. Her eyes wandered from the windows of the old school-room, where Mrs. Temple used to preside with a mildness of sway from which Mrs. Euphrasia Primwell would scarcely have augured the formation of the accomplished and amiable being who now gazed tearfully upon the spot, to those of her father's library, where she was summoned only for an occasional reprimand:—that father who had so amply redeemed his early life of worldliness and harshness, by his latter days of humbleness and peace!

Her contemplations were interrupted by the approach of a woman-servant; who, seeing a well-dressed lady resting so near the house insisted on her "walking in." "She had permission to show the pictures and furniture during the stay of the family abroad."

Much to the surprise and a little to the alarm of old Pro., Blanche accepted the invitation.

"Better wait for another day, my dear; better wait till John can bear you company," whispered the squire. But Blanche was already in the little vestibule opening from the garden, listening to the woman's explanation that it was "very lucky their visit had not occurred two days before—for *now* they would have the advantage of seeing the pictures of my lord and my lady, as was just hung up in the yellow drawing-room."

Fain would Blanche have hurried to the spot; but, alas! the new hangings and nomenclature of the rooms warred with her recollections. In *her* time, what was now the yellow drawing-room, had been the east parlor—adorned with the mean and peaked portraits of the ancient Downhams, which the fastidious Helen had transferred to an upper floor. She—a Hartley and a peeress—experienced little pride in descent from a tribe of Suffolk squires—which, to a Jeremiah Smith, had appeared little short of Howardhood.

If the names of the chambers in which as a child she had so often played, conveyed no reminiscences to her ear, the portraits of "my lord and my lady" proved equally strange to her eye. The handsome haughty couple on which she gazed, were not her childhood's companions. "Helen" and "Hart." were gone for ever! The noble pair limned by Francis Grant were the Lord and Lady Hartingham she had seen at a distance in Hyde Park, or who had coldly saluted her amid the mob of some London ball.

So pre-occupied was her mind by these reflections, that she walked vacantly on, without exhibiting half the respect the housemaid considered due to the Lyons brocade of the blue drawing-room, the gilt lantern in the great hall, or the velvet hangings of the dining-room. She moved like one in a dream: and no small relief was it, that the Squire was ready with a thousand exclamations of wonder, delight, and consternation. "He shouldn't have known the place! Why, 'twas fitter for a king's palace than for private folks!"

Blanche expressed a wish to visit the sleeping-rooms; but her guide, scandalized, perhaps, by her want of enthusiasm concerning the satins and gold cornices of the state apartments, replied, that they were not worth seeing! and that during the family's absence, the shutters were closed and the carpets taken up! Mrs. Watts, however, persisted—slipping at the same time into the woman's hand a gratuity, the amount of which would have determined her to pick any lock in the house for the satis-

faction of so liberal a lady. The shutters were thrown open of all the principal chambers ere Blanche had half accomplished the ascent of the grand staircase—which she had descended the last time under the overwhelming knowledge that there were sheriff's officers in the house!

"My lady's bed-room," said the housemaid, as she ushered her into a chamber overloaded with all those luxuries of modern invention which seem to render the common routine of life a scientific task.

The heart of Blanche was touched to the core. The first object that met her view was the picture of her mother and Lady Mary, which she had first seen in St. James's Square, and which was pointed out to her by the servant as "her ladyship's mamma, Lady Emily Downham;" while in the corresponding panel hung a picture of similar design, exhibiting two fair faces also enframed together by a garland of flowers—which was explained to her wondering ear as "my lady herself and my lady's sister, Miss Blanche."

Without noticing that the very servants of the hall judged the plebeian name of Watts unworthy to be mentioned among more aristocratic appellations, Blanche was thoroughly overcome by this incontrovertible proof of how large a share she still occupied in the regard of her sister—for the picture had been recently executed. It was one for which she had never sat. It must have been copied from a miniature painted by Louisa as a gift for her once-loved Nell!

Well for Blanche that she heard not the irrepressible exclamations of her good father-in-law, who, between his joy at seeing the picture of his Pearl in the house of her ancestors, and his fear of betraying their *incognito*, was a study for Buckstone. "He had no patience with Lady ——, ahem! Such inconsistency! Yes! a vastly pretty picture!" he continued, addressing the woman in attendance, "and *may* be—ahem!—a likeness!"

"Why, yes, sir—most people call it a fine likeness—the young lady in particular, sir; for though not to be talked of with Lady Hartingham in p'int of beauty, it seems Miss Blanche was much beloved when the family resided in these parts. There's been a power o' folks from the village, since the pictur' was hanged up, begging and praying for a sight on it!"

Pro. Watts, with his face in a glow, now began rubbing his hands, as though, instead of August, it were Christmas.

"No later than half an hour ago, sir, there was a gentleman here, sir," continued the woman, ("a gentleman as set down from a coronet carriage with posters, to see the place;) who stood looking at that pictur', as pleased, sir, as you're alooking at it now! 'Ah!' says he, 'you've got new family portraits, since I was here,' says he. 'The Diamond and the Pearl, and by no means bad likenesses!'"

Still influenced by the thrill of pleasure produced by these grateful reflections, Blanche took the old man by the hand to lead him from the room where he might otherwise have been found the following day, transfixed before her picture, smiling to himself like Malvolio; and conducted him to the school-room, now transformed into the sitting-room of Lady Hartingham's own maid.

"How well I remember," whispered Blanche to the Squire, placing her arm affectionately within his own, "the first time a certain awkward school-boy was ushered into this room; and how he amused the two little girls in blue sashes he came to be introduced to, by stumbling over the dumb-bells, and falling off his chair, for want of courage to sit further than the edge! *He* nearly died of fright, and Helen of laughing at him! for which she was duly reprimanded by Mrs. Temple. And I, too, was scolded, I recollect; but it was by Helen—for taking his part!"

"A matter o' twenty years ago!—a matter o' twenty years ago!" cried the Squire, wiping his eyes. "And who'd ha' thought that shy clumsy boy would live to have his name toasted at half the public dinners in the kingdom, and mentioned in the great letters of all the journals in Europe! And, what's more, that (so little has he changed from that day to this,) he'd give fame, name, and all else he possesses in the world, to afford an hour's pleasure to one of those little girls in blue sashes, who even then was called 'the Pearl of Downham Hall!'"

To retire from the house, they were forced to retrace their steps through the gardens, at the gate of which, the pony-chaise was awaiting them; or they would have perceived, under the portico of the grand entrance, the travelling-carriage and posters still drawn up—indicating that the "gentleman as com'd to see the 'ouse," was still on the premises.

As it was, they proceeded leisurely—on their own thoughts intent—skirting the rich flower-beds, and inhaling the fragrance of the magnolias; when, lo! on reaching once more the crystal palace and the rock-work in process of erection on its northern side, the astonished Blanche found herself face to face with—Lord Stokesleigh!

CHAPTER XXXII.

"I QUITE understand what took him there!" said John Watts, when, on her return from her drive, his wife related the circumstance. "It is but a step out of his way from town to Stokesleigh Manor; and I can imagine his curiosity to visit Lady Hartingham's brick and mortar, or rather plate-glass realization of the Arabian Nights' Entertainments they used to plan together. But what I do *not* understand, my dear Blanche, is how you could allow my father, 'the best-natur'd man with the worst-natur'd muse,' to persuade you into so false a position as to be found creeping through the back door into Downham Hall!"

"Lord Stokesleigh expressed no surprise at seeing me there," she replied. "From his manner, I do not believe he is aware of the alienation between us and the Hartinghams."

"From his manner, infer nothing! Talleyrand himself was not a more adriot dissembler.

On the contrary, if Stokesleigh seemed to take your visit to the Hall as a matter of course, be assured he was both surprised and shocked to see you there."

"How can you endure the company of a man you think so disingenuous?" burst from her lips.

"I think him politic, not disingenuous. Stokesleigh is one of those who would not lie; but does not feel called upon to volunteer disagreeable truths. As to his company, I like it as I like to turn a page of Machiavel. And now, explain to me, if you can, dear Blanche, why you did not persuade him to accompany you home; or at all events, why, being so near the Lodge, he did not himself propose to pay me a visit?"

"Explain the conduct of a man who, by your own account, holds with the diplomatic Prince, that language was given to man to conceal his thoughts?" said Blanche, with an unembarrassed smile. "All I can tell you is, that I presented Lord Stokesleigh to your father, who joined with me in inviting him; and if he was clever enough to discover, in spite of the warmth of my invitation, that I was much better pleased he should stay away, it is no fault of mine. His excuse was a very valid one: that he had invited a party to meet him at his own house, and had only allowed himself half-an-hour's grace on the road, to visit Downham."

"But did he name, did he commit himself, did he tell you explicitly *whom* he was expecting at the Manor?"

"If he did, they were people who interested me so little, that I have forgotten their names," rejoined his wife. "But he told me, what scarcely interested me more, that as partridge-shooting commenced to-morrow, half the world was on the road."

"True, I had forgotten that confounded 1st of September!" said John Watts; who still seemed to conceive that Lord Stokesleigh's journey required explanation. "But, unluckily, there are always fellows enough left at White's, to form a jury. And nothing would annoy me more than if Stokesleigh were to write up word to Lumley, Winchmore, or some others of the set, that he ran against you and my father forcing your way into Downham Hall! Through Lady Sophia Dufresne or some other letter-scribbling fool, the thing will certainly reach the Hartinghams by the time they get to Alexandria!"

"And if it *did?*" remonstrated Blanche, who had been made too happy by the sight of her picture in Helen's dressing-room that morning, to find *anything* a cause of grievance. "I am going to write to my sister by this very post. What would it signify that she heard from others what I am resolved to relate to her myself?"

"That you met Lord Stokesleigh at Downham?"

"No!—That I visited her house, and was deeply, *deeply* touched to find that, though my company has grown indifferent to her, the remembrance of old times is *still* so dear, that she chooses to keep my portrait ever before her! As to Lord Stokesleigh, I cannot understand why everyone seems in league to bring him into discussion between my sister and me! *I* could well dispense with ever hearing his name again! As to Helen, she has marked *her* value for his society, by absenting herself from England at the very time he selects to take up his abode within thirty miles of Downham Hall."

Still, John Watts looked uneasy. His pride was a little sore. Stokesleigh, his pretended neophyte, had passed within a mile of his house, without taking the trouble of a visit.

"Blanche was right," mused he, as he sauntered away alone into the meadows that evening, to get rid of his ill-humor, "Blanche was *quite* right in forewarning me, that the acquaintance of such a man would end in becoming a burthen. To create real friendship, there must be equality of rank and fortune.—'The aristocracy of talent,' is a specious phrase. But as society is at present constituted, it is a *mere* phrase. I may feel myself the equal of Lord Stokesleigh, in elevation of mind and patriotic energy; but he, while allowing me these qualifications, knows that he retains over me a thousand superiorities of privilege and precedence. Lord Carlingford affects to treat me as an equal, because I am an active support to his party; Lord De Hauteford, because, but for my holding forth at his political dinners, they would fall lead-like to the ground. But neither the one nor the other entertains a greater personal regard for me than for the gunsmith who makes his rifles, or the coach-maker who builds his carriages. The laurels of the aristocracy of talent, which give me a place in the House, do not lodge me half so near them as the strawberry-leaves of two tedious old blockheads, like Lord Dorchester or the Duke of Dumfries!"

Such was his bitter soliloquy. But there were bitterer reflections still to come. He felt that he was the worse for his lordly intimacies of the two last seasons. Virtue had gone out of him. Instead of sharpening his wits by fierce encounters of reasoning with his professional brethren, he had lost ground by talking down to the level of such wishy-washy politicians as the De Hauteford clique. He had been forced to put so much water in his wine, that his palate had forgotten the flavor of true Falernian!

At any other period of his life, these regrets might have preyed upon his spirits, and rendered him morose or reckless. But his whole heart was now absorbed in the peril of his Pearl; and the Lodge was just then environed by such an atmosphere of peace and love, that Satan himself might have been disarmed by its influence. Before the party of Stokesleigh Manor achieved the glory of bagging its first hundred brace of pheasants, he had the happiness of finding himself the father of a fine boy, and knowing that he had given a second "hostage to fortune."

But as if to balance the statistics of the family, the month succeeding the convalescence of the almost too happy Blanche, was marked by a singular mortality in the Hartley family.

Miles, the second son of the Colonel, who in his premature decripitude had progressed into General Hartley, after paying for a single year's dissipation in Paris by several of severe suffering, was at length released; his younger brother, Edward, having died gloriously in India the preceding year, in one of these remarkable victories which have added so many heroic names to the records of contemporary history.

Though sunk in habitual intemperance, the General was often heard to lament that his early prodigality had deprived him of the means of affording to these ill-fated sons the comforts and honors of their station. But though fully aware of the ill-effects his example and extravagance had produced in his family, he could never be induced by the peevish whinings of Lady Mary, while glancing round their comfortless home, to coincide in her opinion, that Hart. ought to have paid their debts and placed them in a more creditable position.

"The fortune's his wife's, I tell you!" growled her once good-humored Tom. "You wouldn't have him put his hand into her pocket, and *steal* for his father and mother? By all accounts, they have not more than enough for themselves! Hart. might have contributed something, to be sure, towards getting poor Edward exchanged into the Guards, as I so much wanted. And Miles, poor fellow, might have been living at this moment, if we could have procured the means of taking him to Nice"—

"And *that* I wrote myself to Hart.; and it did not procure so much as a fifty-pound note," interrupted his wife.

"But when I tell you that the fortune is his wife's?'

"A woman's property is her husband's!"

"Ay, but from the moment Helen took upon her to say that Hartingham married her for money, he might well be scrupulous!"

"After all we did for him in his boyhood, he has no *right* to be scrupulous when the comfort of his father and mother is at stake," persisted Lady Mary. "There is *he* living in luxury, while *we* can scarcely struggle on,—even now, when alas! our family is so sadly, *sadly* diminished. As to Helen, she is a vain, heartless creature, whom I shall never forgive myself for having preferred for a daughter-in-law to that amiable Blanche! She would never have allowed poor Miles's dying bed to be destitute of comforts; or have left my letters unanswered, and gone off yatching to the Levant, without giving herself the trouble of crossing to Boulogne to take leave of us, because we were down in the world!"

The poor General, whose mind was weakened by much care and much brandy-and-water, felt the tears rise into his eyes at this recapitulation of his injuries. He was, perhaps, more inclined to see the dark side of the picture, because the last spark of hope which had hitherto irradiated his cheerless prospects, was on the eve of extinction: Lord Glastonbury, to whose earldom he was the heir presumptive, being, after a long term of unsuccessful suitorships, at length about to commit matrimony in earnest.

The Duchess of Dumfries, unsuccessful in securing a partner for life for Lady Augusta (the perfidious Mawman having fled from town per express train, without a word of explanation, at the close of the session,) made an excursion to Glastonbury Castle when on a visit to her daughter Lady Marian, at Holcombe Manor, on her way to Dumfries Palace, for the express purpose of disinterring their fossile cousin.

The prim Lady Hartleys, or as they called themselves the Ladies Hartley, taken by surprise, felt highly gratified by such an attention on the part of a fashionable Duchess of unquestionable morality. But they soon discerned the truth. For under the influence of her smiles, the old beau their brother began, like some apple-tree in the column of a country paper, to put forth a second crop of bloom.—After adverting to those traditionary days when Glastonbury Castle beheld the annual halt of the Delaval caravan, he proposed that they should be speedily renewed; and no sooner were the Duke and Duchess ensconced under his Lordship's roof, than the shrewd old spinsters plainly saw there was no hope of getting rid of them, till the noose-matrimonial had been fastened round the neck of their poor superannuated Cherubino.

Unaccustomed to be flattered save by his sisters, the youth of fifty-four fell a ready victim to her Grace's cajolements, and died without a struggle. Like his own Southdowns, he had become the tenderer for age.

When Lady Augusta sat blushing by his side, his wax-doll face dimpled sweetly into smiles; and his well-turned head, a fair casket empty of jewels, was unable to furnish words for the expression of his bliss. To have waited so long for a wife, and at length obtained the daughter of a highly-descended and wealthy duke, was certainly enough to warm even his tepid egotism into a glow.

It was noticed, however, that on the day of the departure of the family for Dumfries Castle, while his venerable sisters clustered round the Duchess with the most deferential adieus, Lord Glastonbury's eyes had become somewhat stony, and his dimples suddenly paralyzed. Perhaps, because he was taking leave of Lady Augusta, previous to his departure for town for a settlement confab with his lawyer: *perhaps*, because apprised the preceding night by the Duchess, that, as a sum of thirty thousand pounds had been appointed on her marriage as Marchioness of Delaval, by way of settlement on younger children, her dear Augusta, sharing it with five brothers and a sister, possessed only a portion of four thousand odd hundred pounds; —about a fifth of the sum anticipated by the Earl!

For a man who, regarding his hand as an investment, had held aloof from the loveliest young women in England lest he should be entrapped into disposing of himself under prime cost, to have been sold at last for a song, was indeed a retribution. But it was too late for redress. The Duchess had taken care that the newspapers should circulate to the four corners

of the earth the news of his forthcoming alliance; and had communicated to Majesty itself intelligence that the mature merits of her dear Augusta had met with their reward. All his lordship could do, therefore, was to trust that his lawyer might create a flaw in the indictment: by rendering the settlements too rugged a road to get over in order to reach the church door.

But, alas! on arriving in town, he found to his disgust, that all was as smooth as glass! The Duke of Dumfries's solicitor and his own, who happened to be cater-cousins, had prepared a sketch which rent his very heartstrings! Jointure—pin-money,—were apportioned precisely as became the daughter of a high-born Duke as the wife of a wealthy Earl.

On the following day, urged by the malice of the fates, he visited the counters of Howell and James, to select a set of diamonds, suited less to the illustrious quality of his bride, than to the perceptions of a man who regarded such glittering trash as the most unprofitable of investments; and on finding that, screw as he might, brilliants were not to be had at the cost of rose diamonds (such as had sufficed his late mother as the prudential wife of a Bishop), he almost staggered out of the shop!

Forced (being for the first time in London without his family) to dine at a club—the immediate outlay rendered the choicest viands unpalatable. His appetite wholly forsook him; so that, when compelled to invite Lord Francis and Lord Robert Delaval to dine with him at Boodle's, they could not help noticing the haggard looks and perturbed demeanor of their future brother-in-law.

On the following day, the knocker in St. James's Square was tied up, and straw laid before the door seemed to announce that the blooming bachelor, whom Stokesleigh always persisted in calling the spinster of Glastonbury Castle, was confined. And so he was, by a dangerous fever. He had been picked up insensible at his dressing-room door, after perusing a draught of settlements submitted to him by his lawyer; containing fresh aggressions upon his property on the part of the Duchess. Bilious obstruction had placed him at the mercy of this terrible shock; and as the doctors, sent for in all directions by his terrified servant, "came not, single spies, but in battalions," he was made to swallow calomel enough to have extirpated a regiment of dragoons.

Before his sisters could be hurried up from the castle to his aid, all was over, and Lady Augusta's "occupation gone!"

By this sudden event, a number of families of the highest distinction (as the newspapers say) "were placed in mourning;" to say nothing of the affliction of Sappy Savory and other industrious tradesmen, who were actively at work in preparation for the approaching nuptials.

But this unlooked-for catastrophe, while it completed the mortality already adverted to in the Hartley family, produced a miraculous change in its prospects. The General, who, broken in mind and body, succeeded to the earldom—the peevish Lady Mary, snatched out of her slough of despond to become a Countess—afforded sad verification of La Rochefoucault's assertion, that "we rarely achieve the objects of our ambition; and when we do, it is at a time and under circumstances which strip them of half their value;" for the first exclamation of the new Lord, on learning that he was in possession of ten thousand a-year, was—"Poor Miles!—poor Ned!—too late!—too late to save them!" while the new Countess had the honesty to add—"And poor Hart, too! Had he become rich a few years sooner, he might have married Blanche Downham, and become a happy man—instead of that cold-hearted woman, who has so cruelly estranged him from us all!"

Even the two new Ladies Hartley (who had gone through as many vicissitudes as the dolls of a puppet-show, which are transformed from queens into shepherdesses, and from shepherdesses into queens,) though pleased as a queen's counsel at the thoughts of changing serge for silk, had been too long acclimatized in France to look forward with much satisfaction to the ceremoniousness of the splendid city.

There was some satisfaction, however, in recollecting that, rich and great, they now rose superior to the unkind sister-in-law, who, since her accession to fortune, seemed to have forgotten their very existence. Lady Glastonbury, too, anticipated much pleasure from the act of curtseying out from the castle the venerable spinsters who, seven years before, had rendered her own exit so humiliating.

But the old *bon vivant* had kinder thoughts in his heart, *He* could not refrain from exclamations of—"*Now*, my only remaining son will be restored to me! At last, I shall be able to secure the independence of my poor Hart!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

When Parliament was convoked anew by the Black Rod, (which, like a leader's baton in an orchestra, calls into action the first crash of the overture,) a new Earl took the oaths—as thick in mind and body, as his predecessor had been spare; being the fourth numbskull within eight years, whom the privilege of the Glastonbury peerage had endowed with the right of legislating for the benefit of the nation!

Not a few of the former friends of the new Countess felt ashamed, moreover, of having allowed her so thoroughly to escape their recollection during her exile, that, on learning her accession of rank, they were forced to look into the last edition of the peerage to be satisfied that there was no *d* after her name; and that Lady Glastonbury was really their own Lady Mary!

One of the first visits paid by her ladyship, was to her niece Blanche. Aware of the generosity she had displayed towards the Hartinghams in their hour of adversity, her ladyship doubted not that from *her* she should obtain some indication of her son's whereabout. For though Lord Glastonbury had addressed letters to him at Cairo, Malta, Athens, and Naples

it seemed uncertain whether they could ever reach his hands; or whether the newspapers would be the first to acquaint him with the altered prospects of the family.

Painful was it to Mrs. Watts to avow that she knew nothing of their movements. Still more painful, to perceive that the avowal created no surprise! Lady Emily and Lady Mary Hartley, who had accompanied their mother, merely exchanged a smile; and right glad was Blanche when the arrival of her little boy, who had been sent for to be admired and caressed, distracted their attention from the absent. The two girls appeared to be kindly-hearted beings; eager to love and be loved by the cousin whom their mother's indiscretion had often cited to them as "the first love of their brother Hart., and worth a thousand of her sister!"

Even their mother had become considerably softened by a life of trouble, and the untimely loss of her two sons. She admitted that she looked forward with pleasure to living on happy terms with the daughter of her poor sister Emily, who most resembled her mother.

Under any circumstances, the cordiality of Blanche's reception in St. James's Square would have made a pleasant change in the life of one who had sometimes felt ashamed that the only fireside to which she was sincerely welcomed, was that of her father-in-law. But, many reasons made her rejoice at the return of these near relatives. In the first place, their house afforded a sort of neutral territory, where her reconciliation with Helen would naturally and imperceptibly take place. In the next, she was not sorry to be supported against the warring waves of the London coteries, by the affection of near relatives, who certified her as of gentle blood. Her estrangement from St. James's Square and Bodmin House, had hitherto rendered her connection with the Hartinghams rather an injury than an advantage; and though, during her first season in town, the vogue of her husband bore her high above the detractions of the world, the time was come, when that overgrown bully began to revenge itself upon her for its previous excess of subservience. The fine ladies, whose self-humiliation had been wholly gratuitous in begging and entreating for her company, lost no opportunity of making her sensible that they repented their weakness; that they could have Grisi or Persiani for paying, who sang as well as herself; and that as to John Watts, he was a thing that had been—puffed down like a beacon on the Goodwin Sands, by the first equinoctial gale!

As Blanche herself was of opinion that her husband's parliamentary efforts the preceding session had been less happy than his wont, (attributing the falling off to its true origin—that the occasions which had called them forth were of a less-exciting nature,) she was not surprised that the mass of inferior minds, which fancy they acquire distinction by following in the wake of every great reputation, or as the French expressively call it, *faire queue a la comete*, had somewhat modified their partisanship. But she was astonished, when her husband, in a moment of irrepressible ire, confided to her that Lord Carlingford, at the suggestion of his party, had taken the liberty of lecturing him like a schoolboy—hinting that, if public opinion continued to tax him with supineness and weakness, Farnham and himself must look out, at the next election, for a more efficient representative!

"Conceive, if you can, my dear Blanche," cried the infuriated man, "a blockhead whose literary attainments scarcely enable him to put the alphabet together without a blunder, and whose judgment would not suffice to keep him out of a lunatic asylum, if exposed to an inquest *de lunatico inquirendo*,—conceive his having the right to call me to account, like a shop-boy!"

"It is precisely to put an end to such shameful rights, my dear husband," mildly rejoined the Pearl, "that your eloquence has been exercised in favor of Parliamentary Reform."

"Ay, and shall be again!" he rejoined; "and again and again, till the rights of the people to equitable representation are fully established. But not, my dear Blanche, at the prompting of an old jackass! Am I a senseless puppet, pray, to move as such people as Lord Carlingford and Lord De Hauteford are pleased to pull the strings? No, no! Let him seek another representative for Farnham! There may be found in England such a thing as an honest constituency, which has recognized in me one whom neither interest nor menaces would cause to swerve a hair's-breadth from his duty!"

Blanche was silent. Candor forbade her to instil false hopes into his mind. For she felt convinced, that if the representation of Lord Carlingford's borough were withheld, he would find it different to obtain a gratuitous seat. Public opinion, that mephitic exhalation, more capricious and wavering in its influences than the cholera itself, had decided against him.

"You, too, are of opinion, then, that my star is declining?" he inquired, with an air of chagrin.

"Not your star, dearest,—your popularity!"

"You perhaps also consider that Lord Carlingford was justified in calling me up, like a pedagogue, for a taste of his ferule?"

"Custom only must determine the extent to which the representative of a borough is accountable to its patron;" replied Blanche, mildly. "But I own I should prefer having to render my account to gentlemen, like Lord Carlingford and Lord De Hauteford, to speech-making in the Town Hall of some manufacturing town,—hooted down by nail-makers, or groaned at by frame workers, according as I put more or less of conscience in pledging myself to perform their behests."

"On that point, then, we totally disagree," cried Watts, warmly. "A greater than I, has said, that the voice of the people is the voice of God:—to which I am ready to submit without a murmur. But to be lectured by a titled idiot, or admonished by the 'whisper of a faction,' is a thing that would 'stir the very stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.'"

Perceiving that he was excited beyond all reasonable grounds, Blanche forbore from a rejoinder: and after a discreet pause, she pro-

ceeded to try the effect of music in charming the evil spirit out of Saul.

But she was now frequently compelled to have recourse to such expedients to soothe his chafed spirit. It has been often said, that nothing is so trying to bear as adversity, unless a sudden flux of prosperity. But far more difficult to support is a fall from public favor, without cause or grounds.

It was now that the silvery side of Blanche's character manifested itself to the fullest extent. Her whole time and thoughts were devoted, not to consoling her husband, but to prevent his discovering that he stood in need of consolation. When at home, she was ever by his side; during his leisure, with his boy in her arms; but when he was busy, with needle-work in her hands, and preserving a considerate silence. She gave him music when he wanted it,—attention whether he wanted it or no;—sought out the most striking passages in the new books, for the complete perusal of which he had not time; and took careful note in the newspapers of the intelligence he might wish to be recalled to him. Like

"That sweet saint who sat by Russel's side,"

she was a better self to the injured man.

A man of mature age may perhaps derive no injury by contact with the babbling herd. His mind is made up; his faculties are matured;—he cannot be provoked in a moment of giddy excitement, into a rash retort or a misconception of the retorts of others. But the days of the young politician should be spent in dignified isolation; or he will run the risk of being puffed and petted into a prater for effect, whose *point de mire* is the reporter's gallery and newspaper placards; until he ends by printing his speeches for private circulation, and subsisting on the reeking breath of notoriety, as orchids on the streaming atmosphere of the jungle. It is useless to cite in disproof the name of Pitt:—a man so exceptional in position, faculties, and temperament, as to afford no example.

The considerate Blanche, took care, however, to supply by the companionship of a chosen circle of professional and literary friends, the absence of that brilliant world from which she was gradually withdrawing her husband.—When she saw his fits of mental irritation return,—provoked by party slights or the taunts of the daily journals,—she contrived to impose, unobserved, some task or study upon his attention, by seeking information of him on some subject demanding tedious research. As the cure of lunatics was affected by the famous Pinel, by making them labor in the fields, she tried the influence of mental labor as a remedy for aberrations of temper.

Of those who saw them intimately, Lord Stokesleigh was the person most impressed by the wife-like tenderness of her devotion. Had Blanche's inclinations been consulted, he would have been wholly exiled from their house. But Stokesleigh was a man who contrived to give the law to his friends and never to receive it; and at the commencement of the session, his cordial manner of accosting his dear friend Watts at Brookes's, rendered it impossible to reply by an affront.

John Watts, however, maintained his sense of independence, by frankly taxing his lordship, in their first *tete-a-tete*, with having considered the conservatories at Downham better worth visiting than the friend he pretended to regard so highly. And the reply of Stokesleigh was as characteristic as it was candid.

"Had you been inhabiting the smallest hovel of your own," said he, "I should have knocked at the door as I passed, and claimed a morsel of your crust. But you were living with your father and mother,—people of the old school,—who would scarcely have understood such unceremonious dealing. *I* should have shocked *them*,—*they* would have bored *me;* and you would have grown savage with us both!"

John Watts had nothing to reply!

"And now let me answer a question," resumed Stokesleigh, "which I know you will not ask, but which *wants* to be answered! 'Why did I not invite you to *my* house, when Stokesleigh Manor was overflowing with guests?' Because, on the eve of Mrs. Watts's confinement, I did not choose you to visit me as a bachelor; and because a whole year's purification of my house after certain orgies it has witnessed, would scarcely entitle me to ask *her* presence under my roof. Are you answered?"

"Fully; and I thank you for the explanation! I will not pass it on to Blanche:—first, because she never noticed the omission; secondly, because it is far from complimentary to her sister."

"Her sister would not think so. Lady Hartingham, who is at the head of the *lionne* school, would take it as a compliment to be accused of smoking, drinking, or gaming. Such, I hear, have been her diversions lately at Naples;—to the horror of her own countrywomen and the amazement of the Italians."

"The nature of the Diamond is to be as hard as sparkling!" replied John Watts, with a sardonic smile. "Nor is she, I suspect, likely to be improved in spirit by the prosperity which has befallen the Hartleys, or a Countess's coronet in perspective."

"I never venture to predicate concerning female kind!" replied Stokesleigh, curling his lip. "In *my* opinion, womanology is a far more abstruse science than many of those treated by the British Scientific Association. I have even some thoughts of founding a professorship for the study, at one or other of the Universities. Lady Hartingham was hardened by evil days. Who knows but prosperity may soften her,—as the furnace, gold?"

John Watts, with a scornful gesture, shook his head. He considered her formed of metal at once less precious and less ductile.

"I am half afraid, however," resumed Lord Stokesleigh, "that before the Hartinghams revel in their sunshine, they will still have a storm or two to get through. Glastonbury's hands are tied by a load of encumbrances; and I am told that, between the five thousand owing to Efferville, nearly as much more to

that rogue Savory, and odd thousands here, there, and everywhere, our yatching friends may find it convenient to economise on the Continent for a season or two. Amazing, the quantities of money they have managed to squander."

"Nothing of that kind amazes *me* in a man addicted to play," said John Watts.

"In my calculations, I have placed play-debts out of the question; nor has Hart. done much in that way, I fancy, since they came to their fortune," replied Stokesleigh. The extravagance which has emptied their pockets is entirely *hers*."

"He might check it, I suppose, if he liked."

"Ay, there's the rub! He does *not* like. The money is as much her own as the extravagance; and having been accused of marrying her in order to secure it, poor Hartingham's wounded pride renders him over-sensitive in the due exercise of his authority. Endowed with beauty, youth, talent, riches, rank, never did woman take such pleasure in circumventing the gifts of Providence, as Lady Hartingham! She has thrown off her charming sister. She has alienated a husband sincerely attached to her. She has affronted one-half the world, and shocked the other. It is not want of principle or want of virtue that has done all this; for many a woman more ill-conducted remains more liked and loved."

"No, no! it is because there is scarcely a particle of *woman* in her nature!" interrupted his companion. "Weakness bespeaks indulgence; and for softness, our pity always finds excuse. But a cold-blooded, hard-hearted woman ought to rank in the category of reptiles!"

"Hush, hush! Defer your classification till a more convenient season," cried Stokesleigh laughing. "Here comes one who would break her heart at hearing such rough justice dealt to her sister!

"The bird
At whose sweet song the forests ache with love,"

retains only too fond a predilection for her parent nest!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Some days after this conversation, Lord Glastonbury paid a visit of inquiry to his niece.

"'Tis the strangest thing on earth, my dear Blanche," said he. "We might have received letters yesterday from Hart., in answer to my communication of his cousin's death;—if, as Lumley assures me, the Nereid was to be at Naples in May."

"Surely you do not give implicit faith to Sir Horace Lumley's reports?"

"What one *wants* to believe, it is difficult to help believing! You can scarcely imagine how I long for news of my son, and what joy it will afford me to see him again, to throw my arms once more about his neck."

"May you soon enjoy an opportunity of fulfilling your wish, my dear uncle," said Mrs. Watts, *feelingly*.

"To tell you the truth, Blanche," said the Earl, beginning to feel more at home with her, —"there has been ill-blood for some time past betwixt Hart. and his mother. He never forgave her driving him abroad to blot out his boyish attachment to *you*. Still less, for having, as he fancied, manœuvred him into a match with your sister,—of whose heirship to your father's estate, so help me God! the boy knew no more when he courted her, than I do where he *is* at this moment."

His niece was startled,—both by his vehemence and his assertion. Even *she* had attributed to interested motives the fickleness of her cousin.

"And we must own, that Helen's conduct has not been of a nature to reconcile him to the exchange," resumed old Tom. "If my son was to blame for his marriage, he has been severely punished. However, we won't revert to *that!*—*You're* a happy woman, Blanche, which is one good thing;—and now that he is released from dependence upon a wife who has given some grounds for supposing that she don't care a fig for him, let us hope he'll become all he ought,—and then, he'll be a happy man. And 'tis time he *should*, Blanche;—for *my* sake, if not for his. For I'm getting infirm. I've reached the beginning of the end;—and 'twould be hard indeed to die, with but one dear son to keep our name alive, and never have seen that *one* enjoy a really happy day!"

"Let us trust, my dear uncle, that both you and he have many happy days in store," rejoined Blanche, sympathizing more and more in his emotions. "I look upon Hartingham's life as but now beginning:—or rather I look upon him as about to commence a new existence. Good abilities he always possessed;—and if his good feelings have been sometimes a little in the shade, I fear we must blame those connected with him, more than my cousin himself."

"The fact is," pursued the still weakly-fond father, "that as a boy, Hart. was too handsome and too clever, to come to good!—He was too much made of by the world. It don't do to put too young a plant into a forcing-house. Now, my third boy, Ned, who wasn't half so good looking or so brilliant, would have made, had he lived, twice as great a figure in life as his elder brother,—because he'd been compelled to rough it. Our troubles came in time to rescue him from from the petting which spoiled poor Hart. and Miles. Poor lads,—poor lads!—I think I see 'em all three now, with their curly heads, when I ran down to Eton sometimes of a half-holiday;—pushing through the turnstile at Brocas, to shake hands with me, and drag me in with 'em to cricket!—And now, but one of 'em left!—*But one*, Blanche!—And he, roaming the Lord knows where, and caring not a hang for his poor old father!"

Blanche was a frequent visitor in St. James's Square;—sometimes, to listen to Lady Glastonbury's lamentations over the change she found in London society,—"so different from what it was in those brilliant days of George the Fourth!"—but still oftener, to pacify her anxieties about the Hartingham's; of whom, at

present, not a word of intelligence had reached England.

One thing afforded her sincere pleasure under their roof. She saw that all they had undergone had not been undergone in vain. Their household was limited. No additions were made to the meagre furniture inherited by the Bishop from his brother, and still remaining as heir-loom. The Countess had been taught, by years of care, into what elements of anguish Lyons satin and Boule cabinets may be converted; and the youthful Lady Mary and Lady Emily derived their experience of social pleasures, from a land which finds far greater enjoyment in pleasant chat, than in the richness of the brocade covering the *causeuse* on which it is chatted.

The Pearl, in short, had never before seen the family mansion to such advantage. All was now plain and simple. Lady Glastonbury had evidently begun to consider herself an accountable being. Though Sappy Savory had intruded more than once into the house with lying protestations that "the furniture designed for the late Earl, in contemplation of his nuptials would lie upon his hands unless her ladyship would take his case into consideration and condescend to take it, a dead bargain,—for a mere song!"—she stuck to faded chintz and mahogany. Nay, even when, becoming saucy as he grew desperate, he took upon himself to inform her that her son was deep in his books, and that for the enormous advances he had made to furnish Downham Hall, and perfect Bodmin House, he had not yet received a shilling in repayment, which she ought to take into consideration, she simply consigned him to the door. Lord Glastonbury had enough to do in discharging his own long-standing incumbrances without entangling himself anew, to encourage the extravagance of his wealthy daughter-in-law.

"The Jew! the extortioner!" cried Sir Horace Lumley, when his old chum the Earl amused him by relating the anecdote, as they mumbled over their daily news together, in the club-window of former days. But I tell you what, my dear fellow; if you and Lady Glastonbury listen to *his* jeremiads, you'll be having the Duchess of Dumfries wanting you to take Lady Augusta's *trousseau* at a valuation, when one of your daughters is going to be married!"

"'Pon my life, I think we ought to do something for her!" cried the Earl, almost getting up one of his laughs of olden times. "'Twas such a plaguy near thing! And if the poor old beau's wedding had been solemnized instead of his funeral, my dear Lum., where should *we* have been now!"

"At Versailles,—Boulogne,—Coventry!" *thought* the candid friend. But it was more amusing to revert to the Delavals. "The Duchess of Dumfries is worth paying admittance money to see, my dear Glastonbury!" said he. "The consciousness that there is a *trousseau* at home in her daughter's wardrobe, *a prendre ou a laisser*, with its cambric dozens tied up with white satin ribbons and its Flanders lace growing as yellow as a quince, is fretting the poor woman into a fever."

"*You* should take pity on the disconsolate damsel, Lum!" said Lord Glastonbury, without intending offence.

"Thank you! Many a man has led a worse life than I have, to incur such a penance! There's Harry Knox, old Harry as we call him, still a bold bachelor at three-score years, as frisky as my friend Hart. when he left Eton."

"A sad old boy, I'm afaid!" cried Lord Glastonbury, laughing. "Thirty years younger than his own christening. I sometimes wonder at you, Lum.; *you*, Pomeroy, and Wilsdon, who contrive to look fresh as four year olds; while *I* have much ado to stand on my pegs and keep myself out of the long box!"

"Care may have had something to do with it," said Sir Horace. "*You* have indulged in the luxuries of a wife and children, which are pretty sure to bring on indigestion!"

"May be they are," retorted the Earl: "may be they are. I don't pretend that they have not their care and cost. But this I can tell you, Lum., that for every guinea spent, they pay back money's worth in the long run; and for every thorn they plant, their love removes a thousand. Why at this moment, what would the Earldom and fortune I've tumbled into so late in life, be worth to me, but for my children and wife? What pleasure in this world had that dry chip of an old bachelor-cousin of mine, I should like to know?"

"Not much, certainly: but I doubt whether he would have mended the matter by matrimony! A fellow who has not soul enough for one, has scarcely soul enough for *two!*"

"I don't know about *souls*," rejoined Lord Glastonbury peevishly. "But *this* I know, that if it wasn't that Hart. is to come into the enjoyment of the family estates after I'm dead and gone, I should scarcely care at this time of day, to encounter the trouble they'll give me!"

"Why, I suppose my friend Hart. will not be sorry to find himself for the first time master of a ten-pound note that does not reach him through the dirty till of Smith the banker!" retorted Sir Horace. "Harry Knox has often told me that Sir George Downham's father, old Jerry Smith, was a parish-boy, who—"

"Yes yes! *that* story's stale enough: and plague enough we gave poor Downham about it, in the days when Mary and I were madcaps, and thought it fine fun to get a rise out of the pedantical prig! But bygones had better be bygones; and so I shall tell Hart., the first time I can get him fairly to myself; which will be often enough, I hope. Conceive what a resource it will be to me to have his arm to lean upon, and a drive sometimes in his cab or phaeton! I shall be *too* proud, I'm afraid, when I find myself, after all my troubles, arm-in-arm with my son in St. James's Street, and not a soul living have any further right to look us saucily in the faces!"

"No occasion to crow quite so loud at your

own barn-door!" thought Sir Horace. For he was of opinion that once or twice a-day was almost enough for Lord Glastonbury to proclaim that no news had reached England from his son, and that he was beginning to feel seriously uneasy.

Another individual who considered that too much stress was laid in St. James's Square upon the return of the Hartinghams, was John Watts. He was not jealous, he was not envious. But he had not patience to hear the name of two insignificant individuals usurp the place of all rational or profitable discussion.

"Lord and Lady Glastonbury seem to expect," said he to his wife, "that these people, who are probably rambling in Upper Egypt, can be sent for by electric telegraph, and brought back by an express train! Absurd, really absurd! The Hartinghams set out on a yacht excursion, accountable to no one, with few or no London correspondents, nay, desirous, perhaps, that their movements should remain a mystery to such people as Sappy Savory and Co. And because, forsooth, Lord Glastonbury sees a couple of chairs vacant at his table, which he cannot fill up in a moment with his son and daughter-in-law, one is to hear nothing talked about from morning till night, but his "dear Hart!—"

Blanche abstained from reply. The mind of her husband, though, like the waves of the sea, easily lashed up by a contending tide, never failed to resume an even flow on the margin of an open shore. Besides, her own yearnings after her sister were nearly as painful as those of the Glastonburys after their son; and she was too candid to denounce a feeling in which she participated.

In Lord Stokesleigh, however, glorious John found a more indulgent auditor. Stokesleigh would have been as well pleased as himself, that the Hartinghams should remain encamped among the Druses. He was now so happily established in the Birdcage Walk! He came and went, and no one paid the smallest attention! He was at liberty to sit there, watching the Madonna-like loveliness of Blanche as she hushed off her boy to sleep; or listening to the eloquence of harmony, to which, "*come un spirto angelico*," her heavenly nature sometimes gave expansion. At other moments, the dialogue between her and her husband seemed equally delightful. The differences of opinion between them, exposed without jarring or discord, resembled some startling harmonic transition in one of Beethoven's symphonies. A strange mode of existence this, and arising from a still stranger sense of enjoyment, to live the life of a parasite plant, or of the bird which makes its home in another's nest; when he might command a glorious nest, or virgin earth exclusively his own! Did it originate in mean distrust, in the jealousy of a narrow soul; dreading to entangle itself in indissoluble bonds, or unwilling to share with another his liberty, his confidence, and his possessions? At all events, pure egotism was the cause of his disliking the return of the Hartinghams; whose presence in the house in the Birdcage Walk, would, he fancied, destroy the cheerful, but tranquil seclusion of the "well-ordered home, man's best delight," in which he found such powerful attraction!

Little did he surmise, meanwhile, how strong an influence this home was beginning to exercise over his character. Men are the creatures of habit. The strongest characters are amenable to steady schooling; as, in Guelderland the oak, the weed of the country, is trelliced over alcoves. The traitor, who had at first sat out the speeches of John Watts, with the intent of toadying himself into his confidence, unable to close his ears and understanding, had become insensibly interested in the State questions developed in his presence.

And he who came to yawn, remained to pray.

Nor were his manners less improved than his mind. The hard audacity of his nature was softened. He who, the preceding year, would not only have accepted the invitation to supper of Don Juan's marble commendatore, but hob-and-nobbed defyingly with the spectral statue, was now conscious of a thousand humanities hitherto torpid in his heart, like the living things discovered in the centre of a block of marble.

Still, the more he brought himself to the level of the elect of soul with whom he was associating, the less did he desire that the ship news of the times should announce the arrival of the Nereid!

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Here comes Glastonbury, with his old song of 'O where and O where is my roving Nereid gone!'" whispered Sir Horace to Lord Harry Knox, one afternoon at the club. "Pray observe that Glastonbury makes his appearance every day to a minute, with the evening papers!"

"For heaven's sake, let me get out of the room before he hobbles up the steps," cried Lord Harry. "He has been boring me, for these ten days past, to look out for a handsome park hack for him, to be ready for Hartingham's arrival; as if one had nothing better to do than to lounge in dealers' yards!"

"No matter! he'll easily let you off—he's the best-natured soul breathing!" said Lumley. "He fastened upon *me*, in the same way, last week, to procure him some prime Hermitage; because, forsooth, my son and heir can't dine without his Cote Rotie! But I took particular care not to trouble myself; and I suppose some one else proved more obliging—for he now lets me alone."

Before they managed to escape from the room, the newspapers were rustling in the hands of old Tom.

"My dear Lord Glastonbury," exclaimed Ralph Holcombe, suddenly brushing past Sir Horace and his friend to shake hands with him, before he could read a syllable—"I saw your brougham coming up the street, and pushed af-

ter it, from Boodle's, to wish you joy. You'll have the Hartinghams here, perhaps, before the day's out! Look in the Globe, my dear lord, and you'll see in the ship news from Gibraltar—'sailed on the 14th, the Nereid schooner.' Look in the Globe!"

The Earl tried to do as he was bid. But his hands, which shook habitually from early intemperance, now trembled so violently from agitation, that Ralph Holcombe could not manage to direct his eye to the paragraph. When at last he found it, and pointed it out to Lord Glastonbury, to decipher the small print without spectacles was impossible; and the poor shaky father was as long in shuffling them out of their case, as Lumley and Knox had been in shuffling out of the room.

"Yes—true as I live!—sailed on the 14th; and we're now—what are we?—the 25th, eh? Yes! Wednesday, 25th May," said he, reading aloud from the heading of the paper in his hand. "But the winds have been easterly for the last week!" added he in a doleful voice; "so I doubt if they will be here yet for a day or two. Where's Lum.? I thought I saw him here just now—Lum. is so weather-wise! *He* always knows about the wind, and that sort of thing!"

But Lum. had already scudded away to get out of hail of his friend!

"At all events, I'll run home and tell this to Lady Glastonbury," added poor old Tom. "She's got one of her nervous headaches to-day, poor soul, from anxiety and suspense. Would you mind giving me your arm, Ralph, as far as the Square; for I've sent off my brougham, meaning to walk home?"

The good-natured Squire cheerfully consented. And Lord Glastonbury was soon repeating to his wife and daughters the welcome news that, "perhaps before night, their dear Hart. would be with them again!"

While occupied with these puerilities, others were occupying themselves far more seriously with his family affairs.

Had he waited half an hour longer at White's, Lord Glastonbury would have seen the newspapers gradually neglected by its habitual loungers, for whisperings and interjections of horror. Eyes raised to heaven, and hands outspread, attested that some dreadful occurrence was creating emotion in the fashionable oyster-bed.

"But surely Glastonbury must have heard it by this time?" said Lord De Hauteford. "Surely the family would have been the first to hear of it?"

"No," replied Lord Winchmore, who appeared to have brought the news into the room. "It was written from Malta to Lady Sophy Dufresne, who has got a brother or cousin, or lover, or something or other, commanding a regiment in the garrison."

"Glastonbury certainly knew nothing about the matter half an hour ago," interposed Lord Dorchester; "for while I was skimming the evening papers, he annoyed me by talking all the time to that Northumberland neighbor of his—Holford—Holdham—I don't know what—"

"Holcombe—Ralph Holcombe—the man the Duchess of Dumfries hooked in for her daughter, by petting his prize oxen," said Winchmore.

"And they were precisely discussing the sailing of Lord Hartingham's yacht from Gibraltar," resumed Lord Dorchester. "Glastonbury went off in the highest spirits to announce that the Nereid was probably already at Southampton."

"And so it may be," added Lord Winchman, "for it is bringing home the body!"

"God bless my soul!"

"How dreadful!"

"Who will ever have courage to break it to the family!" cried several voices in succession.

"After all, the story may not be true," interposed Lord De Hauteford, stating that he had spoken half an hour before in the lobby of the House of Commons to John Watts, who was in the highest spirits—thanks to a noble majority, generally attributed to the effect of a speech he had just made, which rivalled the greatest of his political triumphs of former years. "Had a serious calamity befallen the Hartinghams, this could not have been the case."

"It may not be true, certainly," was Lord Winchmore's cool reply. "Still, I cannot imagine any correspondent of Sophy Dufresne's possessing imagination enough to invent such a romance—so circumstantial, or so coherent. But, by Jove! here comes Stokesleigh—so we shall get at the very root of the matter! Stokesleigh, my dear fellow, come and put an end to a thousand conjectures. Has Hartingham's body really arrived off the Isle of Wight? And was the man who killed him, an Englishman or an Italian?"

Though the new comer answered not a word, the instantaneous change of his countenance spoke volumes. The deathly paleness of his face, attested that this was his first intelligence of the unhappy fate of his friend. A chair was luckily at hand; and but for the fear of exposing himself to the ridicule of the light talkers around, Lord Stokesleigh would have asked for a glass of water.

"Hartingham dead? Hartingham assassinated?" cried he. "I have heard nothing about it, positively nothing! Where does the news come from? What is the exact story?"

"The exact story," repeated Winchmore for the tenth time, "is, that on their return from Egypt, the Hartinghams went cruising about on the coast of Greece and the Ionian Islands, where they picked up a friend or two, Greek Counts, or something of that sort, to whom they gave a passage."

"And one of those confounded fellows quarrelled with poor Hart., I suppose? It is next to impossible to help quarrelling on board ship, especially in bad weather!" sputtered Sir John Trillinton, who had just scrambled in to join the group.

"If you interrupt me again, Trillinton, I won't tell you another word about the matter," said Lord Winchmore, sulkily. But Stokesleigh, silently extending his hand to grasp his arm, seemed desirous to remind him that *some* persons present felt *real* interest in the story.

"Well, then," said he, turning towards

Stokesleigh, and replying to the mute appeal, by relating the rest of his news in a lower key,—"when the Nereid reached Sicily,—Palermo, or Messina, I forget exactly which,—but the place where English people in a decline are often sent to,—the Hartinghams landed with their party, to enjoy the last days of the carnival; and went mooning and masquing about the streets and theatres on Shrove Tuesday, or, at all events, seeing the masks, like other idlers. *There* poor Hart. overheard something he did not like—some observation, I fancy, reflecting on his wife; and instantly knocked down the offender. An insult and a duel, you know, in those countries, are simultaneous. They fought at day-break—with swords—for the Italian rascal was of course a *spadassino*—and poor Hart. was mortally wounded! He was carried back to the yacht to die, (to avoid, I suppose, the interference of the authorities) and Lady Hartingham is now bringing him home to be buried. And that, my dear Stokesleigh, is the long and short of the story."

"Pray God it may prove a false report!" said the horror-struck man he apostrophized, as soon as he recovered some presence of mind.

"I'm afraid *not*," added Winchmore—"for the newspapers, you see, have no hand in it. A private letter, and from an English officer, brought the intelligence."

"And to whom?"

"To Lady Sophia Dufresne."

Stokesleigh shrugged his shoulders with contempt. To *that* source he had traced so many a lying rumor!

"At all events," said he, "I'll jump into my cab, and go and hear her own statement of the matter, before I proceed to alarm my friends the Wattses by the report."

On arriving at Lady Sophia's, however, she proved to be, as he expected, "out." Unlikely that her little ladyship should neglect an opportunity so dear to a tittle-tattler:—not often could she command the first-fruits of a tit-bit of scandal to offer to her friends! She was gone, therefore, to relate in twenty successive houses, with gestures of well-acted commiseration, a statement that blighted for ever the hopes of more than one human heart.

To hurry to the Birdcage Walk was Stokesleigh's next alternative. But the Wattses, according to their wont during the session, were taking an early dinner, and he could not intrude. Dismissing his cab, therefore, he determined to while away the time by sauntering up and down near the Abbey, with the view of waylaying his friend on his transit through St. Margaret's churchyard towards the House of Commons.

When at length they found themselves arm in arm, and the sad story was communicated, John Watts, if scarcely less shocked than himself, was far more credulous. *He* was perhaps less versed in the mendacity of the flying reports that issue from such coteries as that of Sophy Dufresne; moreover, the end attributed to his reckless brother-in-law was just such as might have been predicted.

"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" said he, with tears standing in his eyes, ready to gush forth. "His whole life has been a blunder, his whole career a mistake. Born with everything the heart of man could desire for his son—talents, figure, fortune, rank—he has lived and died a vagabond! Poor fellow,—poor *poor* Hartingham!

But it was easier to descant upon the dreadful event, than to deal with it. What was to be done? How was the report to be verified? They drove to the Admiralty—they drove to Lloyd's. But, alas! the "ship news from Gibraltar" had been correctly reported by the papers; and nothing further was known of the arrival of the Nereid! To this unsatisfactory investigation, a long conference ensued; and it was finally settled that Blanche should be cautiously apprised of the report, and despatched to St. James's Square to spend the evening with the family; that she might be on the spot to afford comfort and counsel in the event of their receiving positive information.

Meanwhile her husband would repair straight to Southampton; that on her arrival, the unhappy widow might find a friend to receive her. It was probable that letters announcing the calamity which had befallen her, had miscarried; or that they would arrive by the same tide that brought the Nereid into port.

"I would offer to be your substitute in this journey, my dear Watts," said Lord Stokesleigh; "for, at such a moment you must want to remain in town with your wife. But my name had better not be mixed up in anything relating to Lady Hartingham. Even if I were not certain that my presence would be unwelcome to her, I would not do her the injury of intruding upon her at such a time."

John Watts nodded his head acquiescently. If the truth must be told, he cared very little at that moment, for any injury that threatened his sister-in-law. It was not the thought of *her* affliction that tended to lengthen his face and darken his brow.

But his eyes grew red with unshed tears and his voice hoarse with emotion, when he thought of that fine young man—the last scion of his race—who might have become a faithful servant to his country, had time been spared him for redemption of the follies of his youth. "Ruined by his wife," muttered John Watts, as he hurried home to prepare poor Blanche for the painful duties awaiting her; "ruined, heart and soul, by his wife! And yet, thanks to Dalilah's silken curls and brilliant eyes, the world will be on her side. The world will pity *her*, and call *him* hot and headstrong; and, lo! their tale will be told."

It was not, however, in such a vein, he dared accost his wife. He could not venture to tell *her* the evil he surmised about Helen. Her grief was at first too overpowering to listen even to his words of consolation. But when the first stroke of her emotion had subsided, she agreed in all his plans; and ere he started for Southampton, he escorted her to St. James's Square.

Strange as it may seem, she could scarcely make her appearance there at that hour without exciting surprise. So strong are the conventional influences of London life, that to ar-

rive uninvited for an evening visit, at the house of even a near relative, is a step that requires explanation. As an excuse for her intrusion, therefore, she took with her a basket of beautiful flowers she had received that evening from Doesbury Lodge; and on remarking that, as she had sent an excuse to Lady Theodora Trillinton's concert, her husband's absence at the House of Commons would leave her dull and solitary at home, she was as earnestly pressed as she desired, to spend the evening with her aunt.

But now that this first obstacle was surmounted, the painful difficulty of the task she had undertaken, became doubly apparent.

That evening, her ladyship did not want to work. Seated beside the open window, near a balcony crowded with the summer flowers with which, even in London, the delicious month of June refreshes the earth's dreariness, it afforded her occupation enough to chat with her niece; talking with her over old times, and anticipating new and better to come.

She spoke of her daughter-in-law with indulgence,—almost with affection. Helen, with her pleasant face and joyous spirits, was to restore cheerfulness to the house. Helen, the idol of society, was to introduce Mary and Emily into the world. "We shall all be happy together, *now!*" she kept repeating: while Blanche with her soul sinking with her, kept listening in agony, lest some passing carriage should stop at the door, or some unusual sound announce the arrival of a messenger.

Another dilemma soon presented itself.—Though Lord Glastonbury was now in the habit of spending his evenings with his family, a companion secured to his wife who would prevent her missing his society, suggested to him that the occasion was a good one to go and get a rubber of whist; and on finding that Blanche's carriage was waiting, he asked the use of it as far as St. James's Street. This was precisely one of the contingencies against which her presence was to provide. At his club, some hint of the fatal truth would be sure to reach him.

"I will lend you the carriage with the greatest pleasure, dear uncle," said she. "But as I am so seldom able to come and spend the evening with you, surely you will not disappoint me of the pleasure of your company? I should be ashamed to encounter my husband's raillery on my return home, if he found that the only beau in St. James's Square had quitted the house to avoid me."

Thus entreated, the good natured Earl reseated himself in a moment; laughing heartily at her appeal to his gallantry.

"Ay, ay! the only beau in St. James's Square, at present, my dear," said he. "But in a day or two, please to remember, we shall have Hartingham at hand to do the honors to you. And then, Blanche, and then, ma'am, we shall have you, perhaps, coming to drink tea with us a little oftener than you have done lately."

A cold shiver ran thro' the frame of his niece.

She mildly endeavored to introduce a solemn shade into Lord Glastonbury's cogitations.

"Is it *wise*, my dear uncle," said she, "to be so sanguine about *any* forthcoming event? Is it *safe* to fix our happiness upon things that lie so little at our own disposal as——"

But Lord Glastonbury interrupted her. "He would not listen to temporizing remonstrances—he would not hear a single hint of the dismals!"

"No, my dear Blanche," said he, "we have had more than enough of care and trouble in our family; and Providence owes us *some* compensation. Be it in the shape of a happy meeting with my son: eh! mamma? We won't have this wench of a Blanche of ours, whose soft blue eyes and alabaster skin, have so much more of the dove about them than the raven, come croaking here like a bird of ill-omen."

And again he laughed heartily.

"*Do* be quiet, Tom! I *can't* make out what those men are saying!" languidly interrupted Lady Glastonbury, as at that moment several newsmen who had gone the round of the Square bawling their "second edition of the Globe, Globe!" "*Third* edition of this evening's Standard!" paused under the open window to reiterate their cries.

"By Jove, since you won't let me have my whist to-night, Mrs. Blanche!" said the Earl jocosely, while hastening to ring the bell, "I'll have an evening paper to amuse me! May be, the Overland Mail's in? In that case the wind must have been favorable for the Nereid."

While he gave orders for a Standard to be bought, Blanche felt that all courage was deserting her. It was more than probable that the horrible report circulated by Lady Sophia, might by this time have reached the papers. Turning towards Lady Emily Hartley, beside whom she was seated on the sofa, she threw her arms round the neck of the astonished girl, and burst into tears.

"Blanche is ill, mamma! The room is too close with so many flowers! Blanche is about to faint!" cried Lady Emily, on finding her cousin's cold face lie heavy on her shoulder. And for a minute or two, Lord Glastonbury's attention was diverted from the newspaper he now held in his hand, by the indisposition of his niece. But Blanche tried hard to rally.—Herutmost strength would, alas! soon be needed!

"It is nothing,"—said she, raising her pale face, and taking thankfully, from the hand of her cousin Mary, the glass of water she had flown to fetch.

"Nothing but the flowers! Nothing but the flowers!" added the Earl,—satisfied by her endeavor at a smile, that there was very little the matter. And he began leisurely to unfold the paper with one hand, while the other dived into his pocket for his spectacles.

In another minute, a hollow groan burst from the depths of his heart, as though a grave were rent asunder. The first paragraph which had met his eye, under the full-sized capitals of THIRD EDITION, was headed, "Arrival of the NEREID yacht at SOUTHAMPTON, having on board the remains of the late RIGHT HON. LORD HARTINGHAM, accompained by his lordship's widow and suite!"

A moment afterwards, they were busied in administering restoratives to Lord Glastonbury; who, on learning the dread decree which bereaved him of all the hopes of his old age, sank senseless to the ground.

So fearful a shock, following an interval of prolonged excitement, had proved too much for his enfeebled frame. Even his distracted wife was forced for a while to disregard the anguish of her feelings, in order to devote herself to the unfortunate man, who was, with some difficulty, restored to the consciousness of his loss.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The dawn of morning found the distracted family, tearless and grief-bewildered, still watching for the arrival of the express which they doubted not, had been despatched to them with authentic tidings of the calamity, to the truth of which they could not yet be persuaded to yield implicit credence.

The first impulse of Lord Glastonbury on recovering from the stupor produced by a shock so overwhelming, was to hasten off to Southampton. But when the gentle voice of his niece interposed to assure him that her husband was already there, prepared to issue orders in his name, and conduct her sister to town, he was content to remain. He wanted, indeed, to be with his wife and children. He could not bear to lose sight of them for a moment. When Lady Glastonbury retreated into an adjoining room to indulge unwatched and unmolested, her paroxysms of grief, a cry for "Mary," soon recalled her to her husband's side. The miserable man could not live without her hand in his own.

Yet it was a trying thing for her to remain with him. *He*, franker of nature than herself, did not spare himself or her, while taxing the rigour of Providence with having dealt *too* hardly by them!

"It is all our own fault," said he, "all, *all* our own fault. Had we done him justice, he would have lived to a good old age, an honor to us and a credit to himself! Oh! Mary, Mary! Hard is it to abide! But, for this great misery, *whom* have we to thank, but ourselves!"

Fain would the agonized mother have soothed her stricken conscience by recriminating upon Helen. But she dared not. She knew only too well that, whatever might be the levity of her daughter-in-law, and whatever its share in bringing about the catastrophe they deplored, the marriage was of her own making.

At early morning, Blanche quitted them for an hour;—less for the alleged purpose of visiting her child, than to learn whether news from Southampton had reached her home; and during the brief absence of the angel of comfort, whose persuasive words had solaced them through the night, the regrets,—the repentings,—the remorse of the bereaved parents,—were still more openly confided.

"Had he married that kind good girl," repeated Lord Glastonbury, again and again, "poor Hart, and his wife, and his child, would have been at this moment happy inmates under our roof."

At noon, a slight stir in the house, suspended for a moment their murmurs, nay, the very pulsation of their hearts. But it was only their niece, returning to apprize them of her husband's arrival; his journey having proved as bootless as it was kindly intentioned. The Nereid had, indeed, entered Southampton river the preceding day, but only to touch there and despatch letters to town. Lady Hartingham, evidently as a pretext for further delay in company with the sad object of which she had undertaken the guardianship, decided that, as a nearer approximation to its last home, the yacht should bring round, by long sea, the body about to be surrendered to the grave.

"My husband has already started again for Woolwich," said Blanche, after communicating further minute particulars of his tidings. "As the wind is favorable, it is possible that my sister may reach London to-night."

The delay was a welcome respite. Worn out by watching and weeping, the family had grievous need of an interval of repose.

But when the evening came, and another night was commencing, a messenger arrived from him who was so kindly devoting himself to fulfil a kinsman's duties towards those who had chosen to treat him as a stranger;—stating that since, even with wind and tide still favoring, the Nereid could not possibly be up the river for many hours, he should sleep at Woolwich. Neither he nor his wife, however, had courage to apprize Lord Hartingham's afflicted parents, that they were acting in obedience to Helen's commands. For the letter they had received from Southampton was not such as her sister felt justified in communicating to the family. It was *too* grief-stricken,—*too* frantic! That she accused herself as the murderess of her husband, might not hereafter be regarded by Lord and Lady Glastonbury as the insane raving of despair.

So wild, indeed, was it tenour, that, fondly as poor Blanche desired to clasp her afflicted sister to her bosom, she dreaded rather than desired the moment of her arrival;—not alone because she came accompanied by that solemn object which converted into bitterness and anguish so many tender affections and endearing reminiscences; but because she looked forward with awe to the outpourings of one of those convulsions of the heart, when from those we love, as from God himself, "no secrets are hid."

Installed in St James's Square in the chamber destined to her sister's use,—the very one which had witnessed their first interview with their grandfather, she lay down to rest; forewarned by her husband of his desire to effect the transfer of the widow and the corpse, at an hour when their arrival would not be an object of vulgar curiosity. It was consequently no surprise to her to be hastily summoned from her rest in the dim twilight of the early summer morning; while the family were still wrapt in the deep sleep produced by prolonged expectation. She was at the foot of the stairs in time to greet the arrival of Lady Hartingham.

"It seems scarcely an act of kindness to res-

tore her to herself," whispered he, with deep feeling, to his wife, who knelt weeping beside the unconscious form he had deposited on the sofa. "When you have witnessed her mental sufferings, my darling Blanche, you will perhaps think, as I do, that it were happier for her to be laid at once beside that poor fellow in the grave!"

As yet indeed, the Wattses knew little of the afflicting circumstances which had bowed the head of Helen to the dust; although, distorted by a thousand malicious exaggerations, they were becoming the theme of general discussion in club and coterie.

The idle inferences of the world, upon the subject, it is needless to relate. The facts of the case were few and simple. As has been already stated, the Hartinghams, while at Corfu, became acquainted at the Governor's table, with Count Agostofoli and his brother,—Zantiots of noble family and agreeable exterior,—whose lively manners recommended them equally to Lord Hartingham and his wife:—chiefly, however, to the former. And when Hartingham, on learning the desire of the elder Agostofoli to visit Sicily, proposed to give him a passage in the Nereid, the project was instantly opposed by Helen; partly on account of the constraint imposed by the presence of a stranger in a vessel of only 200 tons burthen; but still more because, by securing pleasant society on board, she was afraid the visit might not only be prolonged throughout the remainder of their Mediterranean cruise, but serve to prolong the very cruise itself. Whereas *her* sole object and desire was to return to England in time for a glimpse of the pleasures of the London season.

Such, however, was not likely to be the impression of the indifferent persons who witnessed the devoted attentions to Lady Hartingham by which the Count, as became his age and gallantry, judged it necessary to repay the hospitalities of his host. On landing at Palermo, to enjoy the diversions of the closing carnival, the handsome Zantiot was accordingly regarded as the *cavaliere servente* of the beautiful Englishwoman, of whom he was the unremitting attendant.

In that country, there was nothing in such an arrangement to call for reprobation. But, unfortunately, the haughty manners of Lady Hartingham provoked general displeasure. Several of those bitter retorts which in London passed for wit—several insolent criticisms on leading members of the Palermitan society—were traced home to her; and thus, cited as sarcastic, proud, and scornful, her conduct naturally became the subject of recrimination.

"These English are really incomparable!" said the young Prince Sanzio Villa-Franca, (brother to one of the fair Sicilians slighted and calumniated by the Diamond of Downham Hall,) loud enough to be overheard by Lord Hartingham, at the last masked ball of the carnival. "Their virtuous *Miladis*—whose eyes are always downcast to the ground or upturned to Heaven—change their lovers as coolly and rapidly as their shoes or gloves! Admire yonder scornful British belle, for instance, who affects to look down on our Sicilian ladies, as light of love, and unworthy the honor of her society. Little more than a year ago, she was here under the protection of a noble countryman of her's, Milor Stokli—the husband playing the smallest part imaginable—mistaken on all sides for the mate of Stokli's corvette, or his *valet-de-chambre*, or—no matter what! And already, you see, she has dismissed him, and replaced him. Agostofoli is now the happy man!"

Such was the premeditated provocation which produced an insult publicly given, publicly received, and almost publicly avenged. Before morning, Hartingham had severely wounded his adversary; but was himself conveyed back, mortally wounded, to the Nereid!

Extended on a mattrass in his cabin, with his distracted wife hanging over him in undisguised anguish of affection, the dying Lord Hartingham made no farther effort to conceal from her how he had loved her—how he had loathed her—or how wantonly they had earned their present doom.

"Our prospects were marred in the very outset of our marriage, my poor Helen," said he, when a brief respite from pain enabled him to thank her for the tears she was unable to repress, and the eager devotedness of her attendance. "We ought to have been happy together. When we stood together at the altar, Helen, Heaven knows I idolized my bride, and had not an earthly ambition to interfere with my attachment. How soon you embittered such feelings by the mistrust which imputed to me sordid and dishonorable motives, it were now ungracious to recall; but, believe me, my own Helen, believe the words of a dying man, that even after you had cut me to the soul by your disdain of my poverty and your contemptuous treatment of my family, I could still have loved you—still dearly, *dearly* loved you—had not a horrible apprehension crossed my mind, that the pleasure you found in Stokesleigh's society, was partly owing to the luxurious atmosphere of wealth with which he was surrounded. Then how I hated you both!—how I hated myself!—how I cursed the fate which had united us! Jealousy of Stokesleigh turned all my blood to gall!—yet I dared not avow my resentment! Enslaved to the world's opinion, I dreaded the ridicule attached to a jealous husband!"

"Yet as I hope for the mercy of God!" exclaimed Lady Hartingham, throwing herself on her knees beside his couch; "never did I indulge in any warmer sentiment towards that man, than the gratification of the idle—perhaps unpardonable—vanity, of enjoying the suffrage of one whose caprices were supposed to confer fashion and distinction. He admired me—and that was enough. Love me, he never did: no, never, never, *never!* And even had his feelings towards me been such as the malignity of London scandal dared to assert, I could not have returned them. *Do* you believe me, Hart.? Do you believe my solemn assurance, that, whatever levities may have injured my reputation——"

"Enough, Helen—enough, enough!" gasped the agitated sufferer, a momentary flash of light brightening his now languid eyes. "No

need of these asseverations. That you were *guilty*, as God hears and judges me, I did not even in my most jealous moments, surmise—or never had I seen your face again! Nay, if guilt had been absolutely proved, I swear to you, that you, or he, or *both*, would have died by my hand!"

"And I, who believed you to be so utterly indifferent in all that regarded me!" cried Helen, clasping her hands.

"You had a right to believe it! I appeared so—I labored so to appear. But you had soon other feelings to resent than carelessness, my poor Nell. I visited upon *you* the insufficient place we held in the opinion of the world. I visited upon *you* the death of the child that left us heirless, and the debts which made us pitiful! What wretched, wretched hours have I passed, as the companion of one who was an object of aversion to me, and to whom I knew myself to be an object of contempt!"

"Had you made the smallest demonstration of affection towards me," pleaded Helen, "I should readily have become other than I was. Not that I attempt my own vindication. I freely admit that I have been cold, disdainful, heartless, worthless! I looked upon myself as your superior—your superior in age—your superior in fortune. Still, believe me, Hart., either remonstrance or tenderness would have subdued my nature far sooner than the apparent indifference of which I was the object. Above all, dear Hart., though cruel it seems to say so, now that you have so grievously expiated the fault, you alone were to blame in allowing a Lord Stokesleigh to be our host, or Agostofoli our inmate!"

"Alone—*alone!*" cried he, with eager affirmation. "There, indeed, Nell, you are exonerated. It was the consciousness, in fact, of the injury I had done you, by opposing your wishes on the subject, which caused me so publicly to resent the slight cast upon you in consequence by Villa-Franca. Even now—dying as I am—(for I *am* dying, my poor Helen—let the fools of surgeons say what they will to you, *I am dying!*)—even now, one of my many regrets in closing accounts with this world, is, that I leave upon its surface a fellow who presumed to calumniate my wife!"

"No, no, no!" sobbed Helen, burying her face in his bosom. "No—you must live! We may yet be happy! Our life is now beginning! Hart.! dear Hart.! tell me that you forgive my harshness—my selfishness—my cold-blooded vanity! All shall be atoned—all shall be expiated! Henceforward, dearest Hart., I will live but for you! I have learned to know you—to love you! Henceforward, I will live to bless you, and be happy only in your happiness!"

He clasped his hands caressingly round her young head, and pressed it to his bosom; but would not deceive her by exciting hopes he knew to be fallacious.

"My day is gone!" said he, in a voice hoarse with emotion. "Yes, my poor wife, do not deceive yourself—it is all over!—and let me unburthen my heart to you at once, before those brutes are here again, with their probes and potions, to extinguish the little breath which is left me:—

"As soon as my eyes are closed, you must set sail for England. It seems hard to trouble you; it seems hard to—but I have a yearning desire, Helen, to be laid in my native soil. I should like to rest beside my grandfather. The Bishop will not refuse me shelter in the family vault."

(Poor Hart.! He knew not yet that the right of refusal was now vested with his father, or that the ancient heritage of the Hartleys was at length his own!)

"The poor Nereid will convey back to England the remains of her master; and do not shrink, my own Helen, from bearing them company. The voyage will be a sad one, dear wife, but not profitless. You will have leisure to ponder over the faults of the dead—to pray to God for mercy on them—and to resolve that, on your own part, such faults shall never be renewed. Will you engage to make this sacrifice for me, Nell? Will you promise me that I shall lie on English earth?"

A burst of frantic sobs impeded the words which fain would have avouched her acquiescence!

"Thanks, thanks! I am satisfied! I know you, Helen. The word you give is sacred! Such a promise will not be broken. Thanks! For I could not—no, I could not trouble my poor father and mother with such a duty. They are old, and they are poor: and even old and poor as they are, the loss of their son will be a trying thing. I have been a sad disappointment to them. But they will grieve for me. Oh! who like parents ever grieve over the dead!"

For a moment, the feverish impetuosity which had been actuating the sufferer, gave way to a tender weakness. Tears began to steal down his wan cheeks, as he reverted to the unhappy father and mother who could so ill endure the burthen of a new sorrow.

"And there is another person, Helen," he resumed, after a silence broken only by the sobs of his wife—"there is another, *another*, who will lament me;—your sister, my dear Helen. Tell her I thought of her in my last moments. Tell her I prayed her to forgive my offences towards her, and to watch over her sister as tenderly as *I* would fain watch over her from a distant world! My dearest Helen, let not an unkind thought ever one moment interfere between you and that excellent sister; for in *her* will be your surest happiness and safest friendship!"

The pledge he sought was fervently and solemnly conceded.

"In yonder box, among my choicest treasures," said he, faintly, "you will find a turquoise ring, which I once gave to poor Blanche, and would willingly have her wear once more for my sake:—to remind her that her prophecies have come to pass, and that, with my dying breath, I recognized their truth. You will find it, Helen, enclosed in a packet with some withered flowers—some flowers you ought to remember, for they were your gift—lilies which you plucked in the woods at Rydal, on the day

succeeding our marriage, and bad me keep as long as I lived."

Suffocated by the tears which these touching reminiscences were wringing out of the depths of her heart, Lady Hartingham had not noticed the entrance of Walmsley into the cabin; not, as she at first imagined on perceiving her, to announce the return of the surgeons; but to deliver a packet of English letters, forwarded from the British Mission at Naples, and just brought on board by the mate of the Nereid.

Her first impulse was to fling them down, unheeded. But the movement of Walmsley's entrance attracted Lord Hartingham's notice; and he expressed a wish to hear a few last words of home.

"My father and mother, Helen!" faltered he. "If there is anything of their handwriting in the packet, give it me!"

Instantly did she select from the packet a letter from Lord Glastonbury to his son. But the powers of life were ebbing apace. He was too feeble to break the seal. Even when she placed it open in his hand, his sight was failing. He could not decipher a line.

"Read it to me, Helen!" said he—in a scarcely articulate whisper. "*I* shall read no more in this world!"

And, lo! the last words that met his living ear conveyed the announcement of his accession to fortune and honors! He was rich—he was independent—*and he was dying!*

"Come to me, my dearest Hart.!" wrote the Earl. "Come and share the blessings which God has given us. We shall not long enjoy them together, my dear boy; for your old father is dropping into the grave. But all will soon be yours, Hart.! and you may live to do honor to your fortune and name. I feel that I am nothing, and *can* be nothing, till I once more fold you in my arms. So come back to me; and with you and Helen, let my days pass in peace."

Before Helen could reach the concluding words of Lord Glastonbury's letter, it fell from her hands. A glance towards her husband showed her that she was reciting it to unconscious ears.

The eyes of Lord Hartingham were fixed—the last breath had exhaled from his parted lips—his heart had ceased to beat!

Ere she pronounced the words, "Come back to me, Hart.!" her husband was dead!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

In the chamber which the banquets of Colonel Hartley had of old so often shaken with mirth, was now deposited the coffin containing the last hopes of his house. All was solemn—all was still, save when the woe-stricken father and mother returned again and again to kneel beside the senseless dead—calling upon the name of him they had loved so fondly—so foolishly—and, by their misguidance, pre-destined to that untimely bier!

The sunshine and shadows of their life lay concentered within that shallow coffin. Henceforward their riches were vain. Their race was extinct:—their name about to pass away in the land.

And yet, so salutary to their souls was the discipline of affliction, that not once did their despair break out against the unhappy woman who was the immediate cause of their sorrow. Her wasted form and pallid face pleaded for her in their hearts. She was too forlorn, too thoroughly woe-begone, to be an object of resentment.

Her two young sisters-in-law, though full of tender commiseration, stood aloof, overawed by the sight of her profound despair. But Blanche was never for a moment absent from her side. Blanche was always there; ready to listen, if she were disposed to relate her tale of trouble and wrong, or her fearful voyage, side by side with the coffin of him whose soul she had unwittingly aided in committing to the stifling grasp of death.

At length, with scrupulous fidelity, the widow repeated to her sister her husband's parting charge and affectionate repinings. She told her all:—her own follies, her harshness, her insolence, her deep, deep remorse;—that the "worm which dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched," were devouring her heart; that all she prayed for was death; and all she desired, reunion in a purer world with him from whom, in this, she had so wantonly estranged herself.

But it was then,—it was in moments of anguish such as these,—that the Pearl hastened to apply the assuaging balm of religious consolation to the heart thus torn and rent; and, lo, as the gentle rain to the desert parched and cracked by drought, came the soothing promises of mercy! By degrees, her lethargic ear and heart were won to attention. And when, at length, tears of repentance burst from the secret sources of overcharged nature, her sister saw that the rock had not been smitten in vain.

The whole family accompanied the body of the victim of its weakness, to its last home; and those who saw the unfortunate and infirm Lord Glastonbury, standing on the brink of the family vault to which he was committing the remains of his last-surviving son, whispered among themselves, that it would not be long ere he was laid by his side.

The honors which they had done so little to illustrate, would soon become extinct; the barony of Hartingham alone descending to the child of John Watts and of the daughter of Lady Emily Hartley:—become, by the death of his cousin, heir-male to Thomas Clement, fifteenth Lord Hartingham, of Hartingham.

It was while bending over that sleeping boy, that Blanche, during one of her brief absences from St. James' Square, ere the funeral train set forth for the North, addressed a solemn prayer to Heaven, to be strengthened against the parental fondness which had done so much to create the frailties of his ill-fated predecessor. Little, indeed, had she desired the ennoblement of her son,—even had his coronet been acquired by a less grievous purchase. So far from participating in the pride of her nurse, (never weary of belordling her nursling!) poor

Blanche turned with sickened ear from the sound of the new name, so replete with painful associations.

Her husband was wiser. "God knows," was his reply to the pretended regrets under which poor good old Pro. endeavored to conceal his exultation at finding himself grandfather to a peer of the realm,—"God knows, my dear father, that when Blanche, darling little Blanche, first engaged my affections, a mere child in the school room, with a brother alive and the prospect of half a dozen more, there was as little chance of her progressing to the representation of the family, as of *my* arriving at the woolsack! So that I can conscientiously say, the distinctions obtained through my alliance with the Downhams, were as unsought as undreamed of!"

"Of course, my dear boy! Of course,—of course! Nobody accuses you; and what's more, nobody but feels that the title of Hartingham is honored by being associated with the credit your public career has attached to our own humble name."

The philosophy of John Watts and moderation of his father were sooner put to the test than anticipated! At the earnest request of the family, John and his wife accompanied the funeral train down to Glastonbury Castle; and strange enough it was, that, after so many intervening vicissitudes, Blanche should enter for the first time the halls of her mother's ancestors, accompanying the dead body of him who, in his healthy happy youth, had wooed her to preside there as his wife!

But when the sad solemnity was over, Helen was too seriously indisposed for her sister to leave her. Her husband's parliamentary duties required his presence in town; but *she* could not quit the Castle.

Dearly as she loved the poor sufferer, this was a trial to Blanche. For though prepared to lose sight for a single week of the darling boy, to whom her friends Lady Rochester and Laura had promised to pay daily visits of inspection, while Nurse Whitfield was permanently established in the house, it was hard to submit to a prolonged absence. Lady Hartingham, indeed, interpreting even in the depths of her grief, the wistful glances of her sister when bidding her husband farewell, proposed that the boy and his nurse should be despatched to rejoin her at the Castle. But the merciful heart of Blanche knew better than to impose such a trial upon the family. The new Lord Hartingham, who had come to supply the place of their heirless son, COULD not be welcome within those walls!

In that parting interview between John Watts and his enfeebled and nearly voiceless sister-in-law, the Diamond, whose brilliant lustre was extinguished for ever, bad him draw near to her bed-side, that she might explain her last wishes and intentions.

"From this day forth, dear brother," she said, "I look upon you and Blanche, and your son, to be as much the representatives of our family as though I had already ceased to breathe."

"Time enough to think of such things!" remonstrated Watts. "We will talk them all over, in London, my dear Lady Hartingham, when you are stronger and more yourself!"

"In London, I will never set foot again!" said Lady Hartingham, as firmly as her weakness admitted. "London has been my bane. In its injurious atmosphere, my worldly heart and superficial mind became poisoned at once. No, no! for the rest of my life I will abide here, near *him*, pondering over what he used to be in happier times—pondering over what he would have become had I not helped to curtail the measure of his days."

"Dismiss such thoughts from your mind, my dear Lady Hartingham," earnestly rejoined John Watts. "The mischiefs which ended by driving the poor fellow into the grave, began in his cradle, years and years before he ever looked upon your face!"

"All I have, will soon be legally yours," said the widow, struggling to exclude the bitter thoughts that tormented her, and drink the cup of consolation which was so kindly proffered. "But even from this hour, I resign the whole administration of the property into your hands. The smallest pittance will suffice my declining days."

"Dear Helen," interrupted John Watts, "I accept your generous offer, so far as to relieve your hands from the burthen of regulating your affairs. Though the debts contracted during your husband's lifetime, cannot be legally enforced on the estate, I know you well enough to be certain that you will not leave a guinea unpaid, which would expose the memory of your husband to just resentment. For years to come, therefore, the whole revenues of your estate will be absorbed. And if you follow my advice, you will forestal the period of your enfranchisement, by at once letting Downham Hall. Efferville will, I know, be rejoiced to take a lease of it. He told me as much, during your absence on the continent."

From the idea of surrendering to strangers, particularly to Lord and Lady Efferville, the creation of her hands, Helen recoiled for a moment. A brief pause for reflection, reconciled her, however, to the proposal.

"Be it so!" said she. "Offer the place to Lord Efferville on whatever terms you please; and free me at the same time, if you can, from my engagements for Bodmin House. Act in my name, fettered by no possible condition or consideration, except regard for the honor of the dead."

On Watts's reappearance in the House of Commons, a thousand vulgar curiosities were on tiptoe, to satisfy themselves by sidewind inquiries.

"I am heartily glad to hear, my dear Watts," said Mawman, "that by the lamented death of poor Hartingham, your son succeeds not only to the barony, but to ten thousand a-year!"

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you!" was the incautious reply. "The Hartingham estate never exceeded fifteen hundred, and is heavily mortgaged."

"Yet poor Hartingham assured me himself, last year, when they were living at Bodmin

House, and I remonstrated with him concerning Sappy Savory's extravagance that they had nearly ten thousand a-year!"

"Certainly. The Downham property alone is worth eight or nine. But *that*, you know, remains in the enjoyment of the widow."

This was precisely what the late M. P. was desirous of ascertaining! It had occurred to him, that a sympathy might be engendered between his own £10,000 per annum and that of the beautiful Helen: a couple of well-matched fortunes being, in *his* opinion, the type of a happy marriage.

Sir Horace Lumley, on the other hand, whose utmost acquaintance with the honorable member for Farnham consisted in hat-touching in the street, rushed out of Boodle's to seize him by the hand, as he sauntered up St. James's street. The ostensible object of his solicitude was Lord Glastonbury. "His poor, dear old friend, Tom Hartley,—how did he bear it all? —Unless a fit of the gout came on, he was sadly afraid the dreadful event might kill him at once!"

But before even the cool and curt replies of John Watts had set the question at rest, the true face peeped out from behind the vizard.

"He had promised Efferville to inquire what chance there was, of his regaining the occupation of Downham Hall: for the furniture of which (*soit dit en passant*) the Hartinghams had never yet disbursed a guinea. Poor Eff. was naturally most anxious to get the place into his hands again; Lady Efferville never having enjoyed a day's health since she quitted Suffolk."

"I shall do myself the honor of waiting upon Lord Efferville, in a day or two," replied John Watts, raising his hat so ceremoniously, as to render further rejoinder impossible.

"How I hate that fellow!" panted the distanced Sir Horace to Lord Winchmore,—the first person on whom he was able to hook himself for an arm to lean upon, up-hill, from Boodle's to White's. "When a Mister John Watts gets among us, and presumes to be as dry and peppery as a devilled potatoe, it ought to be a case of black-ball!—The worst of it is, such people cannot be made conscious of their ostracism. Such people possess the tenuity and elasticity of gutta percha!"

"The harder *you* hit them, Lum., the higher they are likely to rebound!" rejoined the young Marquis, chuckling inwardly at his companion's air of chagrin. And if it turns out true, as Lady Sophia Dufresne's letters assert, that Lady Hartingham is in a deep decline, and has not two months' life in her, the Wattses, at the head of ten or twelve thousand a year, the husband a first-rate speaker, and the wife a first-rate holder of her tongue, will get on in society like an express train!"

"And what do you suppose they'll do with Stokesleigh, then?" demanded Sir Horace, with a malicious smile. "Is he to be heir-loom in the family, or disposed of like any other transferable security? I'm told there's a third sister,—pretty, witty, but unluckily, like the tower at Pisa, all on one side!"

"Since the days of La Valliere," rejoined Winchmore, "one has not heard of a *belle boiteuse* coming to such high preferment. I'm afraid, Miss Downham the third has a poor chance of Stokesleigh. Not only because he's mightily taken with that handsome girl of Rochester's (whom you may have noticed as chaperoned by Mrs. Watts,) but because the poor dear sanctimonious Duchess of Dumfries, finding Mawman and the Commons insensible to the charms and eligibilities of her dear Augusta and her ready-made *trousseau*, is beginning to blockade the Lords!—Her grace is bent, they say, upon converting poor Stokesleigh!"

"Few things would surprise me less than to see Stokesleigh brought at last to mutton-broth and a cotton night-cap!" said Lumley, in a confidential tone. "If ever man wore threadbare every fold and phase of roueism, it is he; and as he is a dear lover of change, he is likely enough to sow rue in place of his wild oats, by way of variety. I am told too, that poor Hart's death shocked him immensely."

"So it did all of us!" rejoined Lord Winchmore. "Yet I don't believe that an ortolan the less was eaten, or a pint of claret the less drunk! 'Tis the law of nature! If graves did not close quick over the dead, like traps in a pantomime, how would the business of the stage of life be carried on?"

By graver personages, meanwhile, the father of the new Lord Hartingham was greeted with a degree of deference which caused the heart of the honorable member for Farnham to burn with bitterness. The party to whom his political triumphs had been wormwood, went further still. Attributing the previous liberality of his principles to the democratic instincts of a man of mud, they doubted not that, by degrees, he would veer towards the patrician standard; and the Duke of Warton, who (though on country neighborly terms with Doesbury Lodge,) had never thought it necessary to recognize in London the existence of the son of Pro. Watts who voted and spoke against the conservative administration to which he was attached, lost no time in leaving his card on the father of a Lord Hartingham.

"These people will drive me mad!" ejaculated John, flinging from him this token of ducal insult. "It is enough to make a radical of one, at once!"

Conscious that, like the eagle in the fable, the potent talons of his genius had uplifted and borne nearer to the sun the heavy tortoise called Parliament, he almost longed to dash the ungrateful reptile to the earth, to render it conscious of his power.

"It never surprised me, dearest John," wrote the Pearl, in answer to his murmurs against these offences, "to learn that the *valets de chambre* of Louis XIV. refused to assist in making the king's bed with Moliere, as only an actor and author. But it *did* surprise me to find that he felt mortified at their impertinence, and thought it worthy of complaint to his royal master!"

The same letter, however, contained intelligence which served to divert his susceptibility from the tickling of such a lesson. Poor

Helen, his wife informed him, was becoming so rapidly worse, that the physicians recommended her immediate removal to a milder air; and as the vicinity of the sea was thought desirable, the sisters were about to proceed from the Castle to Southwold. It was about the time when Martha contrived to quarter herself annually for a few weeks upon the widow of her uncle the Admiral; and Lady Downham was not sorry to secure, in the interim, such eligible tenants for the cottage; the more so, that the Diamond and the Pearl united in an earnest prayer that she would leave them their dear Lou., by way of hostage.

To Southwold, therefore, by easy stages, the invalid was removed; and though Lord and Lady Glastonbury were perfectly sincere in the desire they expressed that she should again become their inmate, the moment her restoration to health rendered a northern climate less injurious, when she was gone, they felt more at their ease.—They wanted to weep unrestrained over the grave and the destinies of their son; and were almost jealous of the sorrows of one whom a forced forbearance alone prevented them from stigmatizing as the cause of his untimely death.

Yet when, at parting, the poor broken-hearted widow fell upon her knees before Lord Glastonbury, and implored his last blessing and forgiveness, it was bestowed in all sincerity, and from the depths of his heart.—Nor was the concession unrepaid.—The few words of affectionate exhortation addressed by poor Helen to the weeping girls, her young sisters-in-law, were of so earnest and solemn a nature, as to remain indelibly impressed upon their memory, —a warning for life.

Arrived at Southwold, where poor Louisa had scarcely courage to welcome back, as a rapidly declining invalid, the brilliant and beautiful being she had so short a time before regarded as one of those

> Bright creatures of the elements
> That in the colors of the rainbow live,

it became clear to Lady. Hartingham's devoted sisters, that she had submitted to the removal, not as likely to conduce to her recovery; but because she wished to die under the humble roof of him to whom she had proved so unnatural a daughter.—She begged to occupy his room.—She begged that Sir George's writing-desk and books might be consigned to her use. She seemed to fancy that some trace of her father must be left in his habitation, to which she might bow down her head, in token of her tardy repentance.

The attendance of Louisa,—that despised sister, to whom, eight years before, she had borne Lord Hartingham's present from Germany, with scarcely-concealed wonder that he should have thought her worthy of recollection, —was doubly dear to her; from consciousness of the disregard with which she had always treated the deformed girl, who, by the Pearl, had been nursed into health, and instructed and cheered into the means of enjoying it. The loveliness of her young face,—the softness of her tread,—and the utter estrangement of her nature from all worldly pleasures or aspirings, —endowed her with almost an angelic charm. Sometimes, when poor Helen woke from her disturbed slumbers, and found the messenger of pardon watching over her couch, she scarcely dared to take her sister's hand between her own, lest it should be indeed a heavenly visitant that hovered by her side.

Thus consoled and thus attended, her end was peace. From the moment of her arrival at Southwold, Dr. Maidstone intimated to the family that her malady, the result of a severe shock to the system, was too deep-seated to be relieved by change of climate; and thus prepared, no sudden terrors disturbed the gentle grief with which her fondly-attached sisters smoothed her passage to the grave.

"No longer the Diamond of Downham Hall, —but dust and ashes!" whispered she to her beloved Blanche, while supplicating her to see her head laid in the family vault by the side of their poor Hart. "Yet thanks to you dear Pearl,—my guide, my sister, my friend,—I have not lived or suffered in vain."

It was enfolding the hands of that g[illegible] sister with those of Louisa, and with nurse Whitfield, the careful attendant of her infancy, anxiously watching by her side, that she quietly breathed her last.

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Since that afflicting event, several momentous years have elapsed.—The father of the new Lord Hartingham has progressed into a statesman; and, the embarrassments of the Downham estate being, by his excellent management, fully paid off, he is about, to the triumphant joy of old Pro. and his wife, to take up his residence at the Hall. But that she knows this measure to be a fulfilment of the last and most earnest desires of her departed sister, it would be trying indeed to the tender heart of Blanche. The sacrifice, however, is shortly to be made; and, as Mrs. Euphrasia Primwell justly observed, in her last epistle to Doesbury Lodge,—"the struggle of feeling will soon be forgotten in the discharge of her new duties, and the exhibition of a prominent example. After all, it is only a generous concession the more, made to the DIAMOND, by the PEARL of DOWNHAM HALL."

THE END.

AUG 10 1936